17



I'd Buy that for a dollar!

Vol. 1, Issue #17, "The Hand that Life Dealt Me."

17

I'D BUY THAT FOR A DOLLAR

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"The Hand That Life Dealt Me"

by Austin Rich

All layouts throughout the issue by Austin Rich. Covers (and old man image) by Design Pirate (***piratey@rackmØunt.org***). Comics by Steve Koriagan (***identitycrisis@juno.com***).

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Poker Face

In general, I'm not the best Poker player around. I know the basics and I've picked up a few tricks over the years, but the one thing you need most – a great poker face – has always escaped me when it was needed. So when I saw those cards in front of me on the concrete riser, just next to the sidewalk, I knew I had to play this hand as cool as possible. It's never too late to learn new rules to an old game. I figured that if I was gonna do it this time, I had better do it the way I'd always wanted to.

I picked up my hand and looked at it:
K♣, J♠, J♥, 9♠ & 9♥. Not bad... not a good hand, but not bad either. This was stud, after all (no trading in your bad cards for new ones); two-pair seemed pretty decent. It occurred to me that I had no idea if two pair beat three of a kind. I didn't think it did, but then again I wasn't sure. It's been so long since I played cards and I know that most of the rules we used as kids were modified whenever we felt like it for whatever reason seemed the most appropriate at the time (generally to aid ourselves in winning). At this point, I'd have to pull out an *According To Hoyle* to tell you much more than the very obvious. In a way, though, I guess it doesn't matter: if making up the rules as we went worked for me as a kid, it sure as hell couldn't make things *worse* now.
I took a look at the cards again, this time checking out the backs rather than the face. There was the typical blue and white pattern I've come to associate with playing cards, with two circles holding mirror images of the same logo: New Phoenix Washington (written around a bird on fire). Looked pretty official to me. They were probably from one of those retired decks casinos sell to

patrons. I couldn't really say for sure, though. I've never played cards in a game I literally walked into while on the street, so I was completely unsure if this was commonplace or not. So many uncertainties. I guess that's what Poker – and, of course, other metaphoric things – is all about.

After studying the cards a bit longer, taking plenty of time to look at everyone else on the sidewalk, I decided to drag the hand out a bit longer than intended. I pocketed my cards like a souvenir and walked off. No one seemed to mind; after all, I'd just found the cards on the sidewalk, and there was no one else tending them or playing poker besides myself. It was the hand that life had dealt me and left behind on the sidewalk. It was a game that I had to play on my own. If that's the way life was gonna play it, I was gonna keep my not-bad-but-not-great hand with me to see what happens.

Still, I'm not used to life being so literal.

Hair As A Metaphor Part I: "These Are The Things I Wish I Knew In High School"



I guess it all really started in High School.

Growing up I had the most unbearable hair, by my standards of course. My dad told me that when he was a kid, he fought for a long time to have… well, long hair. Short hair was out, long hair was in. Why would I want to get my hair cut? I could have a long, flowing and majestic mane of hair instead.

He never seemed to notice how *curly* my hair was, how intensely *thick* it was. Because of the nature of my hair it poofed out to an unbearable size when it was long. Because of the dimensions of my head and the skill with which it was cut when I could finally convince my parents to do so, my hair took on a disgusting sight: a cross between a mullet and a 70's-White-Boy-Afro. My hair was not for the squeamish or the faint of heart. I spent most of my life hating my hair, punishing it and myself with near-constant shampooing in an attempt to keep it straight. When that wouldn't work, I would pour endless amounts of water on it, combing it so vigorously that I would be pulling most of it out rather than getting it straight.

I wanted short, straight hair. I didn't mind the color so much, but the length and the texture was something I would always be at

odds with. Everyone I knew seemed to have exactly the haircuts they wanted, never a strand out of place. Jutting out in any direction it choose, my hair would take on a hideous quality that made me cringe. I spent so much time worrying about it that it soon began to control my entire life. I would look at people and they would look away. "It's the hair!" I would think, and I'd run for a bathroom mirror to see if there was anything to be done about it. My friends were constantly trying to convince me that I should just cut it if I hated it so much. My own ineptness was the only thing that kept my hand still when I thought about chopping it all off. The only thing worse than having horrible hair is getting a horrible haircut.

"Why do you want to cut your hair? It looks so good!" my mom would always say. But every time I looked in the mirror I saw this horrible forest of overgrowth. It seemed to be the only thing keeping me from being truly happy with the way I looked. I dwelled on it endlessly. Finally I had mentioned how much I hated it to my friends one too many times. They, being as cruel as they were kind, offered to cut it for me. I accepted.

There were four of them (Justin, Devin, Jason & Brandon). We'd been out drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes, thinking we owned the entire town. With clippers in one hand and scissors in the other they made short work of the furry tendrils on my scalp. They each took turns, cutting, shaving, giggling, and throwing out muffled words that to me sounded very much like an, "Oops." I cringed. What was I letting them do to me?

When all was said and done, I feared the worst. My eyes met the mirror's in much the same way they meet a girl's; before you knew it I was about ready to let go the tears that were welling up. There it was, for the entire world to see: a bowl cut. I guess a bowl cut isn't the right term, as that would imply that the longer parts

would all be the same length. It looked very much like something you'd see on a 10-year old kid if the parents both had mullets and they wanted their kid to have a "cool" haircut. Shaved on the sides, with enough scraggly bits on the top to cover up the shorter parts underneath. Dreadful.

Whatever it was, one thing was for sure: it was cut. My mother hated it immediately, which only gave me a slight pang of pleasure. After all, I was doing this to make myself happy, not piss her off.

And thus it began: a series of bad haircuts that would haunt me for years to come. I didn't have one haircut I liked for the next six years. Every time I would try to talk someone into helping me out the ordeal would always have to end with either a shaved head or a sub-par cut that not even first-year beauty school students could pass as "bearable". It's not that my friends were bad per se (though that did have some effect on the situation too), but it was the hair itself that fouled them up. They could easily cut their own hair with a lot fewer mistakes. Other people would end up with passable haircuts by the very same people. But when it came to my mop, there was nothing anyone could do about it. It was almost invulnerable.

By now you're thinking, "Wait a minute... its just hair, right? Can it really be that bad?" Worse than you can imagine, actually. The worst thing ever.

I lived in a *very* small town during my high school years. Our town was famous for rednecks, logging pride and chasing a black family out of town. Mullets were everywhere. If you weren't sporting one you were a preppy jock topped off with a little hairspray to keep everything in check. The only way to defend yourself and stay in good favor with anyone in my school was to look good. To do that I would have to improve my hair.

But my hair defied reason and logic. It had mullety qualities about it, but it was so thick and poofy and Afro-ish. Just what the hell was it, anyway? Nobody knew. Nobody wanted to know. The majority of the population looked the other way; no one would make eye contact with this freak of nature whose hair could not be tamed. People crossed the hallway to walk on the other side so they wouldn't have to be so near to the abomination. Girls would see me coming and duck into a classroom or side-hall to avoid me. It was the penance for letting such horrible hair continue to live in this modern age.

"There must be some mistake," I would idiotically try to convince myself. "Hair can't have that much of an effect on their opinions... can it?" But experimentation soon proved me wrong again. As I would pass people in the halls giggles and derisive laughter would follow in my wake. Once I tried to prove I was cool by stopping to talk to someone I knew, but it blew up in my face. My friend disappeared before I could get to the other side of the crowd, and as the hallway cleared, I found myself in the middle of it all with people pointing and laughing. I reached up and discovered several loogies were suddenly glued to my head in various places. I later found a note taped to my back with the words, "Geek Cut," and an arrow pointing up to my hair.

Other times the ridicule would be less obvious, but the impact was sometimes worse. Cruising the halls during lunch once I saw a girl I had long ago thought was absurdly attractive. I made the decision that if I walked near enough to her she would somehow sense this and maybe talk to me. (It had never crossed my mind to try and talk to her outright, mostly because being that forthright was something I couldn't do any better then than I can now.) As I diverted my course for a near-intercept pattern our eyes met for a brief second, just long enough for her to turn her head sharply,

point in my direction and giggle slightly. I was back on my original course in no time – probably the computer lab or the Yearbook room – with my shoes now sharply in focus.

Throughout my entire High School career I dated only one girl. She later left me to start dating girls too (I must have given her an idea) before she settled down and married a guy whose hair is even worse than mine.

These kinds of things are not easy to forget. While there may have been other factors at work in the social chemistry game of High School, every time I looked in the mirror the singular answer would stare back at me like wild gesture marks from a comic strip. Sure, there was a small contingency of heshers and punks here and there that didn't seem to give a shit about my hair (though, to be honest, they were no more friendly to me than any other complete stranger). Plus, I had my small circle of friends who, while not exactly rooting for me to keep the despicable mop, were more than willing to agree with me when I complained about how horrible it looked. Beyond that I was drowning in a world where not even hair gell, a blow-dryer or an entirely new brand of shampoo could make a woman look in my direction nor prevent guys from mocking me.

Four hellish years in High School. I cried a lot at night.

Finally, I graduated, but somehow the world kept going anyway. There was no momentous life-changing perspective gained when I grabbed my diploma, nor did my hair magically become manageable. Everything was still as awful as it had been before, except when people darted away from my head's shadow, it was on the street instead of in the hallways. This was the hand that life had dealt me: disappointment, girls who would not even look at me, split ends that taunted me to no end, and friends who hated my hair almost more than I did. It was only a matter of time before

this hatred for my hair was directed at the person it belonged to instead of the real source of my problems.

Because my first haircuts (*not* supplied by my parents) were so bad, the problem only escalated. Chantal & Steve could tame the beast no better than Justin, Devin, Brandon or Jason. The solution seemed easy enough: I would avoid getting a bad haircut and just eliminate the problem as best I could. Soon enough I took to getting it shaved down to the half-inch level on a regular basis, but even that had its drawbacks. Not only was my hair disgusting and unmanageable, but it grew faster than any hair I've ever seen. If I so much as missed my monthly razor-date it would take on this foul shaggy look; too long to spike, too short to comb, and too thick to draw the look of anyone. I was always under the gun with my hair. Can I get it cut in time before I scare the next person I'm interested in? Panic and stress became my way of life.

Time passed…

There had been some sort of horrible breakup (what else is new?). She ditched me, on my birthday no less, and moved to Portland. Ouch. There was no reason except that her brother was going and he needed a roommate. There was no other guy, nothing done wrong. Just, "Well, I gotta go." I spent a lot of time thinking about it all. I was hopelessly stuck in Eugene with no move to Portland in my immediate future and a job that pleased me no more than my hair ever did. It occurred to me that she had always been like this. When I tried to get close to her she would back off to avoid some sort of emotional attachment. I came to the conclusion that her moving to Portland was an extension of that behavior. Apparently, I must have told her I liked her.

Fuck it. I didn't need this kind of anxiety. I had my beer, I had my friends. There was plenty to do in the miniscule burg

known as Eugene. Why, there were random and infrequent shows... and... a pitiful job market... and... uhm... horrible preppy college students... and... oh, fuck.

Well, there was beer, and there were friends. Conveniently enough they were both getting together that same night and sometimes that's enough. I grabbed my bag, struggled to get it over my head because of the horrible mop atop, and glanced in the mirror before I left the house.

Repulsive. It was reaching High School proportions. I shuddered and left the house. Fortunately, there was no hope of meeting anyone I would want to impress that night. I forced my Walkman headphones through the jungle upstairs and trotted off in the direction of the party.

On the way, I started thinking about High School. It had been years since I had been there. In that time I had seen a thing or two. Friends had left me, girls had left me, I was always moving, I had lost jobs left and right, and my money seemed to be leaving me at a much more rapid pace than the other four combined. It appeared that nothing in my life was constant. Sure, my hair was awful, but it had *always* been awful. It was reliable. Nothing else in my life was. My hair – my horrible, disgusting, filthy, unmanageable, unlikable hair – would always be the same. No matter who I was with, where I was living, or what kind of job I did (or didn't) have.

A slow sigh of relief and comfort escaped from my lips. In the time since High School I was slowly letting my hang-ups go. I had almost completely given up on my old issues and since I'd started drinking I'd become a little more social and a lot less introverted. Could it be that I could finally give my hair the same allowances? Could it be that if I let it go, I would finally be over all of the pain and suffering that's accumulated over the years? The idea was beginning to rise, but it needed some bourbon before it could

properly ferment. I pulled out my flask and began throwing back shots while I made a more relaxed (and less direct) route to the party.

By the time I reached the correct house I had reached a decision as well. In front of all my friends I threw up my hands and drunkenly announced, "I will never cut my hair again... ever!"

Everyone gasped slightly, and turned away in near disgust. This was not the reaction I had hoped for. I took a step back and scratched my forehead, trying to puzzle out what I'd said wrong. Maybe I misspoke? Maybe they couldn't hear me over the music? Maybe I wasn't making any sense? I tried again.

"I've made the decision that I'm not going to cut my hair anymore. I don't see the point in it." There was no way anyone could have misunderstood *that*.

There was a pause as everyone looked at each other to try and figure out who was going to say it first. Finally it came from somewhere I couldn't exactly identify; the voice of the masses responding. "But your hair is terrible!"

Little wells of ocular fluid began to fill as the years of hair-obsession began to rise to the surface. They were right; it *was* terrible. Giving up on it wasn't going to improve it any more than obsessing would. If I was ever going to get over this I would need to face the demon. I took a few pulls off of my flask in silence and tried to figure out if I should go home early or risk loosing it in front of my friends.

And, like an angel in the night, Damien stepped forward and said, "Come on... I'm gonna cut your hair right now."

It was as simple as that.

Damien was a tall blond friend of ours with a penchant for knowing a little bit about a lot of things. He was very focused,

understated, spiritual, and a temple to masculinity. He worked out pretty often, drove a truck, worked with metal to build sculptures in his spare time, and drank like a fish when we all got together for a party. He'd mellowed out from his over-active younger years where he would take on more hobbies than all of us combined, but he was an all around nice guy and often had an encouraging word when things were not going your way.

He'd had a few drinks, but a craftsman like Damien could work under any circumstances. The process was rather quick, actually. A swipe with the clippers, a continued trim with the scissors, and then a final once over to make sure everything was in it's place, and he was more or less done. I was facing a mirror the entire time, so I could see the development as he was working, and before long a decent head of hair was forming in front of me. It was still thick, it was still poofy and ugly in and of itself, but at least it was not getting any worse, and this made me feel as if I could probably face the rest of the party. As I was about to thank him and step out of the bathroom, he put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Wait... let's style it first."

Damien reached for a can of pomade and opened it up. I'd seen the stuff before, but never knew what to do with it. Styling products had never worked well for me. Generally when I was done using them I had a thick mat of hair pasted to my scalp rather than a new and improved 'do. But he quickly softened the stuff up (it was Murray's) and ran it through my hair with speed and precision. He produced a comb from somewhere and molded my hair in much they same way he worked with metal and before long he had pulled his hands away so I could see what he had done.

"What do you think?"

There are times in your life when movie moments come and go. Only in hindsight can we really appreciate the significance of

the moment because it did not pass with a soundtrack, or in slow motion. As his hands pulled away I saw something I'd never seen before: my face. In the past I could never see beyond that which made my blood boil. But after Damien had worked his magic, my hair had finally taken on a quality that left me with nothing to dislike. I looked at my visage for what seemed like the first time in years and smiled.

"It's great," I said, completely nonchalant, as if he had not just fixed the single thing that has been tormenting me my entire life.

The next day I ran out and bought a few cans of pomade and found that not only was there a marked improvement in my personal appearance when I used it, but that once I started using it I couldn't bear to leave the house without it. That night there had been a lot of, "Jesus! That's a whole lot fucking better!" type comments from my friends. I was not about to ruin a good thing by ignoring a financial solution to a (now) simple problem.

The change happened almost overnight. True, there were no new looks of interest drawn from my female friends, nor was there a string of women lining up at my apartment door trying to catch a glimpse of the New And Improved Hair. But the reactions of complete strangers on the street made it all worth it. A group of guys passed me in the bus mall and didn't gawk or point. I knew that my life had finally taken a positive turn. "Imagine the possibilities..." I thought.

Imagine, indeed. If assholes at the Bus Mall were no longer affected by my hair, what about cute girls? I began experimenting with people as I walked down the sidewalk, looking at them as they passed me instead of letting my gaze fall on the cement in front of me. Soon enough a tattooed girl with glasses and a sweater walked

by, and I took the biggest chance of my life by looking in her direction with a smile.

For the first time in my life, she smiled back. As did the next one... and the next one, too.

While this might not seem like much, to me it was all I had ever hoped for in High School. To have the ability to look at girls and have them smile back was such a thrill that I forgot all about being single and miserable and sad and alone. The fact that I could actually look good, could walk down the street with confidence, and actually attract a smile was such an amazing breakthrough for me that pitiful little details (like the fact I was still no closer to talking to these girls) were immaterial at best. It was like I'd just discovered my penis again; the fact that there were beautiful women around me that didn't mind looking back was the biggest turn on in the world.

I was not about to give it up for the life of me.

My hair still grew pretty quickly, but that was no longer the obstacle that it once was. With enough pomade you can do some pretty amazing things, and beyond that there was also hope for a future haircut. No matter how long it got, Damien had proved that it could be trimmed back again. As long as he remained my stylist, there was always the chance that I could look good again no matter how bad things got.

Sure, I had not solved the core issues with my hair, but had merely covered them up with styling products and a knowledgeable friend who could actually cut decent hair. I was still awkward in public. I was still scared to death of women. I still felt like I was in danger of getting beaten up when I left the house. I still had no fashion sense and couldn't put together a passable outfit to wear in public if my life depended on it. Shit, I still felt like a huge dork, behind the times on just about everything that mattered to everyone

else. But now that I was able to hide all of that with hair gell, I could just skate by on my good looks, right?

The symptoms had been treated, but the condition remained. Isn't that enough?

It's Why We're Here In The First Place

I looked at you and smiled, and soon enough you smiled back. But not at me, the guy next to me instead. Soon enough my gaze had trailed back to where it had been for what seems like years. This time, the smile back was reflected right at me in the mirror-like surface of my bourbon. I drained the glass and ordered another. If the first seemed to like me well enough, a second would probably be just as kind. Why not? Isn't that why most people tend to look for a second companion when the first one's gone?

Time hung in the air more slowly than I could adequately measure. Stuck in this bar, in this town, in this state, in this lifetime. It's not like it was anything new. It's not like anything was going to change since the last time I looked at her like that. I could sit and hope and pray that, against all likelihood, the tables would turn, but the fact of the matter is that nothing's changed. It's not going to without a vast upheaval of the world around me. The bottom line was this: the cards had been dealt and the hand had been played. There was no way she was going to suddenly see the situation the way I did, regardless of how many smiles cross my lips or drinks were poured through them. It was time to face reality. It was time to move on.

But first, another drink. It's why we're at a bar in the first place, right?

ABSTRAKT KAT SEZ:



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A Simple Guide To (Broken) Relationships

"Why scream and cry when you know it's true? Why fall in love when there's better things to do?" – Devo

Part I: Finding The Courage To Give Up.

Recently I've become somewhat of an expert in the field of relationships, specifically the long and complicated road after their inevitable demise. In a world where people are constantly pairing off and splitting up you would think a culture as advanced as our own would have instinctively developed coping mechanisms for such a simple problem as heartbreak. Sadly, this is not the case. In man's journey from the caves to the cafes, we've learned very little.

We can't even seem to order coffee without the need to construct an entire paragraph to describe the particular beverage we're interested in. Imagine the difficulty we had in hunting mammoths? We've learned no more about relationships since those by-gone days almost as an extension of that very same obtuseness; modern humans focus less and less or relationships and more and more on which parts of our bodies fit where, and how to manipulate those parts when our partners are suddenly gone.

In the wake of a freshly destroyed relationship it's easy to loose sight of where to go next. Your entire world has fallen apart around you. Meanwhile, your friends and loved ones are happily whiling away the hours they have left until they die. Their own partners, who will soon enough leave them, are sitting comfortably

on their laps, caressing them gently and whispering sweet nothings in their ears (all of which seems to concern money in some way).

In light of the reality around you, it often seems much easier to stand around staring at your feet, hoping that the world will somehow provide you with some sort of sign: something that clearly points in the direction you should go next. Generally, these signs are misinterpreted anyway, as The World doesn't really want you to be happy any more than your ex does. While ignoring your broken heart is an easy way to cope with the problem at hand, there are many people who will tell you that staring at your feet is an unhealthy way to survive day-to-day. They couldn't be more wrong.

Trying to cope with your problems only seems to draw *attention* to them. There's nothing that will ruin a good day's suffering quicker than when you try to cope with the reason you're upset in the first place. Do you really want to remember the pain that brought you to your current state of sobbing in the fetal position on your bed while listening to records? Just imagine how often you have to think about that while trying to *eliminate* the problem. Far be it to get over something when you've got a perfectly destroyed future ahead of you now that she's no longer with you.

Still, many people have recently sought my opinion about what to do when they've given up on giving up. While I have continued to support the "Booze And Cigarettes" coping method (after almost 10 years of personal success), I have given a lot of thought to the idea that there must be some magical "Other Way" to deal with these issues, however unlikely such a thing might be. At the urgings of my colleagues', I've compiled a "How To" guide for those who still insist that happiness is something they'd rather strive for.

Part II: So You Want To Stop Crying Yourself To Sleep.

Before we begin, it's important to point out that the methods below are completely flexible, and are open to personal interpretation. Many people will find my pronoun choice to be rather specific, as if I'm referring to someone in particular, when in fact "*she*" might not have dumped *you*. This is easy enough to fix by replacing certain pronouns and nouns with ones that are more appropriate in your specific case. "She" can become "He," "Him," "They," "Asshole," "Cunt," "Canine," or even "The One Person In The World That Gave Me Complete And Total Comfort Before They Shattered My Life Into A Million Pieces." This simple mental exercise will aid the healing process by making it more personal to you, enabling you to focus completely on what it was that brought you to this pathetic state of being.

It is also important to keep in mind that some steps may be altered, adjusted slightly, or skipped if they do not work for you. While I encourage people to keep razors and knifes around when they are dredging the depths of their destroyed soul, many people have found rope or other dangerous objects much more thought provoking. Where I suggest that people do reckless, thoughtless things that might expose them to disease or drugs, others might find sitting in the dark and dwelling on the past a more effective way of getting over their personal demons. And while I have said time and time again that reading is the best way to find solace in lonely times, most people just don't have the attention span or can't be bothered (especially when it comes to home made 'zines, in which it's obvious the author has put a large portion of himself into every word, but no one seems to give a shit anyway). Regardless of what you do when you set out to attempt the impossible, feel free to adjust the methods so they work best for

you. This way, when it all fails, you have no one to blame but yourself.

(It must also be stated, for legal reasons, that any actual help you may get from my suggestions is not to be flaunted in the faces of anyone who is still miserable as they are liable to hold it against you and think horrible things about you behind your back or in print in the next issue of their 'zine. If the reverse is true and you find yourself worse off than you were when you started, it is *not* the fault of the writer for making you come to the realization that you are a waste of human life who only has less than 70 years left before you're forgotten completely. In fact, if nothing comes of your reading and you are no better or worse than you were before hand, the writer takes no credit for your continued misery. And who would want to, really?)

Part III: Let's Begin The Impossible Journey.

The following steps are arranged in a way that will best represent the order you should do things as you pass through the various stages of your breakup. There are three basic stages of a breakup: Fresh Open Wound, Slow And Painful Truth, and Hopeless Resolution. Within each stage there are three basic steps. Some can be broken up into additions steps if one is inclined to do so. These are merely guidelines, however. Many people will bounce back and forth from stage to stage depending on the lack of success of their recovery. Feel free to go from step to step or stage to stage as you see fit. Keep in mind that when you decide to skip sections or steps that it was *your* poor decisions in the past that caused her to break up with you. In fact, you might want to keep that in mind when you make the decision that getting over her is worthwhile in the first place.

STAGE ONE: Fresh Open Wound

Stage One is easy enough. For the most part these steps are almost universal. (You'll find it hard to skip any of them even if you want to.) Let's begin:

1.) **Deny Everything.** After the initial breakup it's easy to think that it's all over and nothing will be the same again. This is the worst thing a person can think. It's important to remember that just because someone has told you it's over doesn't mean it has to be. If you pretend that nothing's changed soon enough you'll find all sorts of things fall into place (like, restraining orders). While it might be over for them, it's only just begun for you. Redouble your efforts to prove to her how much you care. Make it a point to deny that the breakup ever happened in the first place. If you need to, make up elaborate stories to tell your friends and never admit to anyone that she's left you, even if they have evidence to the contrary (like, her new boyfriend).

2.) **Explore New Vices.** Unlike your ex, alcohol will be there for you day and night (except between 2:30 & 7 A.M., so stock up). Alcohol will never break up with you, never say things to you that make you to feel bad, and much like the prostitutes you'll soon be visiting, will put a huge strain on your income (not that you were going to do anything with that money… except maybe spend it on her). Fortunately for the recently broken up, there are stores that sell liquor, beer and wine in nearly every town in America. For those underage Casanovas there are many homeless people who are more than willing to be shoulder-tapped in exchange for a bottle of Mad Dog. Not only are the solutions to your problems at the bottom of a

bottle, but in some cases tasty cigarette butts are too. It's also advised to take up smoking, speed, over (or under) eating, and E-Bay, as these are all huge strains on your checkbook as well, and will create all-new problems you can then dwell on.

3.) **Combine Your Vices With Technology.** In the wonderful era we live in almost everyone has a telephone and a computer at their disposal. It's important to use them frequently when you are coping with your recent breakup. Keep a list of all the e-mail addresses and phone numbers of your new ex (and any others from your past) within easy reach. Contact said exes regularly while under the influence. When sending e-mail, make sure the messages are long and rambling for ease in comprehension and be sure to make the same points over and over again to help them follow your strained state of mind. On the phone it's important to pretend that you are sober at first so they don't hang up on you. But as the conversation flows into trickier and deeper waters, let the tears do so as well (freely and often, or as needed). Keep a supply of tacky, overused clichés ("But I still love you!" "He can't possibly treat you better than I did." and "How could you do this to me!"), as well as a box of Kleenex at your disposal. Within no time you'll find that not only are you bouncing e-mail left and right, but that all the numbers you keep calling will be disconnected (or are no longer in service).

STAGE TWO: The Slow And Painful Truth

Stage Two begins when the first step in Stage One is no longer an option. For some this is never the case; it's easy enough to muck about in Stage One for years on end. (Some people have built entire careers out of this, though it doesn't pay that well and

the hours aren't very good, much like your current dead end job.) However, when you can no longer deny everything, it's time to pretend that you can move on. While you will probably never give up steps 2 & 3 in Stage One, here are the other steps you'll eventually move on to.

1.) **Focus On Your Faults.** The most important thing you can do in the wake of a breakup is to dwell endlessly on what you did wrong. Obviously, she didn't leave you for nothing, and with careful scrutiny you can find dozens of reasons why she wouldn't want to be with a putz like yourself. Perhaps it's that disgusting nose that plagues your face or your pathetic income (or lack thereof). Sexual inadequacies are always good to bring up when considering your (ahem) "shortcomings", but it's important not to leave out your own neuroses. Any number of your mental issues could have been the straw that broke the camel's back. In many cases you may have to invent new ones you never knew you had. Without hours and hours of self-diagnosis you may never find out what you've done wrong, so it's important to start as soon as possible. In my experience this step works best when you combine it with Step 2 from Stage One, but some breakup experts have found that only with a clear and sober mind can you really reach the level of anguish needed to properly berate yourself. Regardless, you must remember the most basic truth: *she* broke up with *you*. It only makes sense that it has to be *your* fault.

2.) **Listen To Music.** Music, it's been said, can soothe the savage beast, and there is nothing more savage than the way she ripped your heart out. Personally, I have a large record

collection not because I enjoy music, but because I keep myself in a constant state of preparedness for my next inevitable breakup. While experts will suggest certain groups and types of music to help you through this awful time, I've found that nothing helps you forget heartbreak better than sad love songs. Fortunately, the world anticipated your future misery and sad love songs are in no short supply. Almost every band in every genre has a song that fits this bill, be it Frank Sinatra, Johnny Cash, Tom Waits, The Cure, or Al Yankovic. It's important that when you listen to sad music to do it in the comfort of your own room, in the comfort of your own bed, snuggling with your own knifes, with the lights turned out and the door closed. Volume has been a point of discussion for many breakup experts, but personal experience has taught me that louder is better. Not only does this allow every depressing note to wash over you entirely as you wallow in self-pity, but not a single nuance of the song's message is lost on you. This also leads to potential confrontations with your neighbor which is always a source of amusement for the recently broken up.

Extra Credit For Advanced Misery: Try locating sad songs that not only mimic your state of mind, but ones that you think describe your breakup perfectly. Become obsessed with them. Sing them at work often. Copy the lyrics onto paper so you can refer to them when you are not within earshot of a stereo. Force your friends to listen to those same songs over and over until they are sick of them. When they complain that it's all you listen to, mutter about how no one understands you except the artist who wrote the song. Never mind that you've never met said artist nor could said artist have ever had knowledge of your breakup. Why else would he have written the song, anyway?

3.) **Avoid The Outside World.** Whoever said that misery loves company? Not I! Sometimes the most difficult thing in the world is to venture out into it. Why bother? There is plenty to do at home instead. Besides, your friends are only going to be hanging out with their girlfriends, talking about how great their lives are. It would probably do you some good to stay home anyway. You were never really that good at personal hygiene to begin with. A sunny day never made anyone feel good to my knowledge. The comfort of your dark, dank home will provide you with hours of entertainment much better than anything you could find at a movie theater, concert, bar, or any of those places you used to go with her. If you went to these places your friends would just help you try to forget your problems and that's the last thing you want to do at a time like this. Hasn't it been a while since you looked at Internet Porn? Keep in mind those girls would never date you anyway, but it's healthy to jerk off while crying once in a while. Why not check out some On-Line Personals? They would also never have anything to do with you either. Not only are Personal ads a renewable source of contempt, but a perfect way to make other people as uncomfortable as you. Try sending a few disturbing, long-winded e-mails and see what happens. When all else fails, re-read the letters she wrote you. How sharp are those knifes in the kitchen, anyway? When was the last time you checked your supply of sleeping pills? So much to do, so little time...

STAGE THREE: Hopeless Resolution

Many breakup experts are torn between when Stage Three begins in the breakup process. Some maintain that you cannot enter Stage Three until you have become so sick of spending time

with yourself that you need a break from it all. Others would argue that Stage Three can happen simultaneously with Stage Two, depending on your particular personality type. Some have been known to enter Stage Three, fail at any or all of the steps and then return to Stage Two with renewed vim and vigor. Regardless of the particular path you choose, you'll pretty much end up at the same place in the long run with a head full of neuroses that will follow you until the end of time. The added bonus is that you'll also have a complete fear of commitment and the inability to function in future relationships. There's no time like the present to get started on that, so let's dive right in.

1.) **Act Out At Work.** The one place you can get away with things that you couldn't possibly do elsewhere else is your work environment. Not only do you *not* have to like the people at work, but there is nothing they can do to ostracize you if they don't like you. (Except, perhaps, shove you in the back of the store in an unsupported department where the rest of the staff laughs at your trials and tribulations.) The point is, if you continue to meet the arbitrary (and pointless) goals that are asked of you at work every day, you can act any way you want, *and* can get away with it to! Extended crying jags in the break room? No problem! Snappy remarks that cut right to the bone of your co-workers? Perfect! Why not try distancing yourself from the staff to make their jobs more difficult? Or better yet, take out your frustrations on the female members of the staff, mentally equating your breakup as their fault. The sky's the limit when it comes to negative work behavior. Be careful, though. Sometimes you can get yourself into an impossible funk if you let your anguish rise too close to the surface. Not only will you skate the edge of

loosing the job that you already hate, but your co-workers will begin to loose any sympathy they might have had for you if you don't perform your job as well as before. It's important that if this happens, take a paid "sick day" as soon as possible. It's for your own good.

2.) **Develop Impossible Crushes.** Many people will argue that the ultimate goal of any person dealing with a breakup is to get back into the dating game. This is the kind of logical syllogism that, when brought to it's natural conclusion, will only lead people into an infinite downward spiral. Soon enough you'll find yourself a gibbering mass of confusion and frustration referring to all women you meet as, "my next ex-girlfriend." It all seems pretty silly when you think about it. There is no better way to break the cycle than to harbor Impossible Crushes on your close friends and co-workers. Not only is this a plentiful source of women in your life that you will, more likely than not, see fairly regularly in the months following your breakup, but a small percentage of them will begin to act as if they feel sorry for your current situation. They may even feign sympathy. This puts you in an excellent position to try and pick up on them while their guard is down. Never mind that they may be dating someone else (who is probably a friend as well) or that they have already expressed a lack of interest in you the last time this happened. From writing long letters about your feelings, dropping by their homes unexpectedly, and calling them for "coffee dates" on a frequent basis, you'll soon find your friendships strained and any time you spend at work completely uncomfortable for everyone.

Extra Credit For Advanced Misery: Try developing crushes on multiple people simultaneously. Now you have a "decoy" conversation piece when you are working on any one of your other impossible crushes. ("I really need to talk to someone, because I think I'm getting a crush on _____.") The internal conflict of such a scenario will cause you to berate yourself to no end, taking your mind off of the breakup your dealing with in the first place. It was also suggested to me that you could play the "Hot Potato For A Cold Fish" game: when one crush just becomes too unbearable, immediately switch off to a new one to balance it out. Remember, the bottom line here is to try to cure your current issues with dating by developing entirely new ones.

3.) **Give Up Completely.** It has finally come to this: you've tried everything and you're still going for long walks in the rain, trying to work out whether or not you can wait out the five day period until you can get that handgun that will, "solve all your problems." Don't worry, this is a common situation to wind up in. While many will try to tell you that it's not the end of the world, you must ignore this advice completely. In all that you've done and tried you've finally realized that you lost the only thing that really mattered and you can never have it back. It's okay. You didn't want to be happy anyway. More likely than not, your role in life was to be that guy who is perpetually single until the end of time, to end up old and alone as the rest of the world moves on. Let it go. Is happiness really that important to you? Relationships are over-rated anyway. Imagine all the cuddling you have to put up with. Remember how hard it was to keep thinking of nice things to say all the time? Sex is over rated too. Chances are

you can get yourself off just fine without someone gently caressing you and exploring all those places you can't get at on your own. Decent Orgasms? Who needs them? It's not like you sleep alone in a huge empty bed every night. Relax. You've only got another 60 years until you die anyway. You can wait it out alone, can't you? Why don't you go and read that "Life In Hell" book you got for Christmas in the meantime. You've got nothing else to do for the rest of your life...

Part IV: Your Long Journey Is Finally Over.

By now you are more than likely no closer to being over your breakup than you were when you started. I told you, but did you listen? No. You saw that this was some kind of, "Relationship Guide," and you thought, "Hey, I'm depressed, lonely and hate my life. Maybe this can help." Are you really that gullible? Do you really think some sort of collection of words strung together in a particular way are going to outline a useful argument that can help you overcome your current depression? Hey, I've got some land for sale too, if you're interested... cheap!

But I digress. So you've finally given up. You now know that this heartache and pain will follow you until you die, to fester, swell and hurt at those most vulnerable times of the day when you are stressed, confused, horny, and, above all else, not getting off your shift at work for at least another six hours. Relax. Now that you know you can never get over this pain and misery, you should probably work toward that impossible goal of meeting someone else who will inevitably screw you all over again.

In theory it's really easy. Millions of people pair off every day in all sorts of different types of relationships. Logically, all you really have to do is keep doing what you always do.

Eventually the numbers game alone should put you into contact with someone that roughly meets your idea of a person you'd like to date. It's less of a desired goal and more of an eventual destination when you think about it. Odds are, in a world as over-populated as ours, everyone can (and will) get a date sooner or later. It's fate. Think of it in terms of having no choice in the matter. It's the hand that life dealt you. Sooner or later, you'll end up dating another person who will eventually leave you. Comforting, no?

Keep in mind dating is a long and arduous process. It's full of pratfalls and disappointments that are only rivaled by those of breaking up. For those who are capable of actually bridging this first and most difficult gap – that of talking to the person they're interested in – there are hundreds of smaller gaps to bridge before a relationship (in even the loosest sense of the word) can begin to form. Then, of course, there are no guarantees that either of you are suited for each other. You will both become painfully aware of this as the years drag on and you each begin to harbor more and more negative feelings toward each other. Soon enough it will all end in some sort of breakup (the specifics of which will be hammered out by said parties in a grueling series of discussions and arguments in person or on the phone over the next few weeks or months). All that's left now is to begin the frustrating and often pathetic attempts at healing the heartbreak. Good luck, buddy!

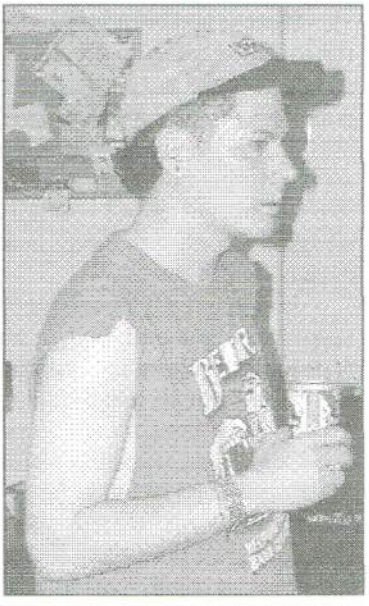
So, what was the point in dating again? Oh right… the sex.

So you should probably begin the search for more sex… excuse me, your next date as soon as you can. Once you have that date keep in mind that you are now the person your friends hate because you are happily paired off, doing all those things that your single and broken up friends only wish they could. More likely than not they will harbor negative feelings toward you (and all

the rest of your friends who are also paired off). Much of their internal dialog will consist of things like, "They take for granted what I only wish I had." Soon enough you will get sneers of hatred from them whenever you and your partner are willing to leave the house that one night a month and join all your single friends at the bar. More likely than not this situation will lead to tension in your relationship with her. Already, you're heading down that road to breaking up.

Sound familiar?

Hair As A Metaphor Part II: The Mullet



Yeah, I had a mullet. A real one. For about two weeks, last summer.

Most people can't believe it. "A mullet? You? How?"

Good question. Where *does* the story begin?

Probably when I moved to this town. The World around me was changing, and no amount of worrying could prevent it. After six years just about any place gets old, and Eugene was no exception. Not only were we each going stir crazy, but it was only a matter of time before we lost all perspective and became so cynical and jaded as to just give up entirely. Something had to be done. We all put our heads and money together and decided to try our hand at the big city. We piled everything we owned into a U-Haul, crossed our fingers, and headed north.

Who knew it would be so easy? After a brief re-adjustment period, it was as if we'd brought everything that was Eugene to Portland. We were like goldfish in that respect, and soon enough we'd grown to accommodate our new environment fairly easily.

The only thing missing from Portland (for me) was Damien, and soon enough my hair was shaggy and disgusting again. No matter how big a town you live in, it's still the little things that get you down.

Since it had been proven that you could in fact tame my hair, it was a little easier to set out of rectify the problem. But why should I? I had not really become a better person because I'd gotten a haircut. I was the same person I'd been when my hair was horrible. However, nobody would know that until my hair was acceptable enough to look at. Just about everyone was so shallow that it didn't matter if I was fun to hang out with, or smart, or whatever. If my hair didn't look good enough, they would never even bother to smile.

And that really pissed me off. Who were they to make snapshot judgments based on something as arbitrary as hair? Shouldn't people be able to judge me on who I am, not who I look like? I thought so, and to prove the point I grew my hair out. That'll show 'em!

One night I was out with some friends at Fellini's, having some drinks and trying to figure out what I was going to do with the rest of my life (a pretty common habit for me). My hair was very shaggy at this point. There was a rather large group of us and we all began chatting about this and that; it was no more unusual than any other night we'd all gotten together before or since.

However, there's was one thing different: a girl. I hadn't really seen her around much, but I thought she was pretty and cool enough. I happened to end up sitting next to her at our table, and to me this was perfect. Sitting next to her made the potential for her talking to me increase quite a bit. I began to sip my beer, biding my time.

Soon enough she asked about where I worked and what I did, and I smiled fairly confidently knowing that having gotten this far, it wouldn't be hard to impress her now. I turned on as much charm as I could muster and hoped for the best. I must have gotten her attention, because very quickly she even mentioned a future date: "Do you even want to try and get a date anymore?"

I was flummoxed. What was she talking about? Had I said something wrong? "What do you mean?"

She sort of snorted, and said, "I mean your hair! It looks horrible. You looked so much better when it was cut short." Suddenly she got very ugly. I no longer wanted to talk.

I downed my beer and told everyone I had to work early the next day. It was a long walk home that night.

Occasionally at parties I would get drunk and threaten to grow my hair into a mullet. It seemed to make sense to me that if people were going to judge me superficially, I should give them something to *really* judge me by. What better way to really give everyone a metaphorical, "Fuck You!" than to show up to a party full of Portland hipsters with a real mullet on my head.

Mullets were silly. Mullets were goofy. Nobody I knew took them seriously and I couldn't really imagine having one myself. But the idea persisted: Mullets were pretty common, even if it seemed like no one liked them. Also, those guys that wore Mullets had a pretty awesome attitude toward the world around them. It seemed as if the Mullet allowed you to transcend all the back-biting bitchiness that hounds almost every other social group in favor of a more positive view of the world.

To a guy in a Mullet, everything is simple. Have a good time, wear cool clothes, listen to cool music, and have a bitchin' haircut. I didn't matter if the rest of the world likes it or not, because to a

guy with a Mullet, other Mullets provide exactly what he needs. A completely self-contained sub-set of culture. Most importantly, they seemed pretty happy about it too. Shit, what other kind of wisdom did the rest of the sub-cultures have to offer?

Whenever I would start talking like this it would almost always lead to someone cutting my hair. That seemed to be for the best in the short run. While these haircuts were never as good as the ones that Damien had given, they were much more decent than any pre-Damien efforts. Plus, you could always fix them up with enough Pomade.

I joked about getting a mullet more and more frequently as my own obsession with it increased. Not only would it be funny to just about everyone, but it would be fun to pretend I no longer gave a shit about anything. That was the real power of the Mullet: to know that the guy wearing it is so beyond the petty social games of Portland that he can actually go out in public. It would be so great to have a Mullet!

Except that I kept *not* getting one. Pretty soon my friends would stop reacting when I would tell them it was my master plan. Chris was always in full support of the idea, claiming that anyone who was actually willing to sport a Mullet in our circle of friends was obviously so much more hardcore than the rest. He argued that no one could ever top it. He called it, "The ultimate act of irony," or something very similar at least.

But no matter how much I thought about it I always had trouble making that last step. I'd let my hair grow, let it get really long, and then pussy out at the last minute and just get a normal haircut like I had always gotten. It was the fear of having a bad haircut again that really kept me in check. The next time people would see me they'd all get upset and start mocking me. "What happened to the mullet?"

"Oh, that. Next time, definitely," I would say. But by then they had all stopped believing me. It was one thing to joke about it, but when you never carry through the joke definitely looses it's impact.

When we'd lived in Eugene we knew a guy named Kelly, who we had affectionately named The Lord Of Darkness. He quickly became a good drinking buddy and all around fun guy to hang out with, in spite of his long hair, love of wrestling, the T-bird in his driveway and the G 'n' R tapes in the glove-box. Somehow he fit into our group amazingly well, mostly because at his core he wasn't a butt-rocker no matter how much he acted like one. We tried to throw a lot of parties and make him feel accepted, which worked pretty well at first. Things were going well enough, but he was a Californian by birth and by nature and the call of the South was enough to draw him back. We understood, so after our huge goodbye party he piled his stuff back into his Thunderbird and drove off into the metaphorical sunset.

We all kept in touch with him via e-mail and got on with our lives without him as best we could.

By the time we'd moved to Portland, we'd formed a new household called Fort Awesome. While not quite the party house we'd had in Eugene, it served our purposes well enough and quickly became a good base of operations. We were pretty proud of our house, putting time and energy into it in as much of an attempt to be comfortable as well as supportive of each other in this foreign town. There were four of us at the beginning, and two of us were still getting our feet wet in Portland. It was not only a survival technique but also just common sense; even in the worst of times, we still had each other to lean on.

That would soon change when Pat paired off with a girl. We were always rooting for each other when it came to getting dates, but truth be told we were jealous of each other's partners more than anything else. Each time one of us got laid, it would only mean less time with each other around the house. It wasn't long before Pat wasn't home as often as he'd been before, and not too much longer before he was always spending the night at her house. By the time he'd told us he was moving in with her we weren't shocked in the least bit; it had been ages since he'd hung out with us as a group and even longer since he'd stayed a night in his own room. Why pay rent on two places when they could more efficiently pay rent on one?

I was used to the revolving door of roommates at the Blitzhaus in Eugene, but Fort Awesome was supposed to be a house founded on Solidarity and Commitment. We were going to fight the battles together, not cheer for the others while in the comfort of a girlfriend's bed. It was disappointing and sad, and it hit Josh & I the hardest. Josh had other reasons for his anger (we don't call him "Angry Man" Josh for nothing), but from my point of view it was the difficulty of finding a new roommate that posed the biggest problem. The group had already begun to fracture; how were we going to find a component that would bring us back together?

Destiny already had it's cards out on the table when my friend Shosh told me she wanted to move to Portland. It look little convincing to let the other guys agree to have her move in, but soon enough they agreed and she began integrating herself into Fort Awesome. I thought this was perfect, an idea mostly motivated by an erection rather than rational thought. I quickly paid the price for this mistake after she'd slept with and betrayed almost all of us, including several regular guests of the house. By

the time we managed to get her out of the house the damage had been done. We were all feeling as if we should rename Fort Awesome, "The House Of Usher." It was obvious we needed a reliable (and male) element in the house if we were going to last until the end of the year without killing each other.

Kelly was the logical choice, and it only took a little more coaxing before he finally agreed to fill this twice-vacated room. All of our lives had felt strangely empty since he'd gone back to California. With his triumphant return he managed to renew the faith we'd lost in our house and home. Once he had settled and got a job (something that, for him, didn't take long), it felt so natural to have him back it was as if the other roommates had only acted as placeholders while we waited for him to show up.

Not only did Kelly introduce a renewed interest in our house, but he also introduced a game that Josh and I took to immediately. The game evolved simply enough, out of friendly bets we had made over breakfast at My Father's Place. It started out harmless enough: "I bet you can't finish that breakfast," he'd say, and there was strong enough evidence to make this a sure thing. If you did finish, however, you got a dollar. If not, well, you suck and we'll make fun of you endlessly. After enough bets like this (using the exact same dollar each time), it became apparent that you weren't just participating for a single dollar. If someone was offering The Betting Dollar™ in a "friendly" bet, you had to accept, or face the shame associated with such loser behavior. Kelly marked up the bill to make sure we would always know which one was, in fact, The Betting Dollar™, and soon enough the game was spinning out of control

The bets were pretty easy to participate in (unless Josh was making them) and often led to some pretty funny scenarios.

Among the more memorable bets: Put Dave's Insanity Sauce In Your Eye (Josh Won The Bet... Ouch), Take The Manly Man Tequila Shot (Snort The Salt, Squeeze The Lime In Your Eye, & Shoot The Tequila), Eat An Entire Onion In One Sitting (I lost, though Kelly couldn't do it either), Take A Shot Of Jalepeno Flavored Sex Lube (Posed By Josh, Neither Kelly Or I Did It, Though Josh Did To Prove How Lame We Were), Josh Gets To Strike You With A Slightly-Padded-Stick On Your Ass Once For Every Year You've Been Alive (I lasted about 5), Go 12 Hours Without Making A Single Reference To "The Simpsons" (Kelly failed, I won), and Who Can Go The Longest Without Masturbating (Kelly won, I lost). There were a lot of funny bets, and we all got some pretty good laughs out of the whole experience.

We made it a rule that the dollar had to change hands quickly so we could keep the game from getting stale, and we found it a lot more fun to do it at parties so our friends could watch us torture each other. It wasn't long before everyone knew about The Betting Dollar™.

One of these parties began as most of them do: Josh, Kelly & I got the idea to get a large quantity of booze and began making phone calls to avoid having to just sit around while talking to each other again. Soon enough we'd wrangled the usual gang into meeting at our place and we began the long and winding road toward oblivion. The only difference was that Damien and his girlfriend Becky were in Portland and had agreed to join us for the occasion.

This was probably the most important for me as my hair was particularly long that night and I was particularly single that month. Summer was in full swing and the Portland women were aware of this and began to put their boobs into tight t-shirts to

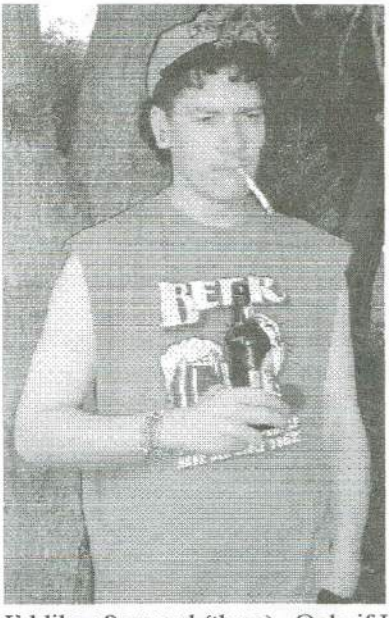
reinforce the point. It was definitely time for a trim and with Damien and I in the same room this could be easily enough arranged. When he had finally arrived and settled into the couch, I sprang the question and he graciously accepted.

And then it happened.

Josh had the betting dollar and had been sitting on it for a while, trying to come up with the most painful bet he could think of. When I finished arranging the haircut with Damien, an evil grin passed Josh's lips followed by a shot of gin. He caught my attention and skipped a beat before he proposed the bet. His mouth watered in anticipation. "For The Betting Dollar™," he said as much drunkenly as he did solemnly, "I bet you won't get your hair cut into a mullet." The entire house erupted with, "Hell yeah!", as they had all been present at one point or another when I'd claimed that I was going to grow a mullet. All eyes were on me.



"For The Betting Dollar™? Uhm..." I tossed back another shot of bourbon and pondered this. There was the humiliation of not going for The Betting Dollar™ with all the gusto you could muster. But there seemed to be other forces at work in my brain. A Mullet? But I'll look stupid! And I'll never



get a date. Hmmmm.

"Uhm… sure," I spat out as if I hadn't just weighed the years of hair humiliation carefully. Everyone lost their shit. It was like I'd announced my candidacy for president.

Damien agreed that he'd cut the hair, and Josh laid out the stipulations carefully. I had to maintain the mullet for an entire month (one). I had to leave the house regularly (two). If, at some point, I actually managed to pick up a girl while I had the mullet, *and* successfully scored with her, I could cut it as soon as I'd like afterward (three). Only if I stuck to the guidelines would I receive The Betting Dollar™, and though it was a much longer bet than our normal ones, everyone agreed that the bet was fair and just. I decided – though not officially part of the guidelines, that I would stop shaving. My facial hair doesn't really grow that fast, but I figured I could get a bad teenage moustache to go along with the mullet by the time it was all over. I grabbed a towel, threw it around my neck and Damien went to work.

This was Damien's first Mullet, and while my hair wasn't technically long enough to pull off a dyed-in-the-wool rendition, it was long enough to create what we dubbed a "starter" Mullet, something that could be cultivated to create a more impressive one

in the long run. We began calling him, "Damien Mullet-Maker," and the longer he worked on it the more impressive it all became.

When he'd finished there was no doubting it: I had a mullet. No matter how short it might have been, you could spot it a mile away. I started laughing at how ludicrous the entire situation was become. Was I really going to wear this hair for an entire month? Would I even last beyond the end of the night?

As the evening wore on my friends were joyously celebrating my hair, but the reality of the situation was sinking in pretty fast. Sure, they enjoyed my mullet, but not because of any intrinsic value the mullet itself held. They thought it was funny. The complexity of the scenario increased more when I put on Josh's sleeveless shirt and started sporting a ball-cap. Like it or not, I was *becoming* the mullet, and while everyone laughed and enjoyed it immensely, I couldn't help but think that I'd made a horrible mistake that would catch up with me before the month was up.



My first inclination *was* to just stay home the entire month. But I *had* to face the music and go to work. This would be easy enough, though, because my co-workers already had a strange opinion of me. At the time I worked in the receiving department anyway. It wouldn't

be that hard to cope with a mullet if it kept to itself in the back room, loading and unloading shipments of books. Sure enough no one seemed to think it was any stranger than the skateboard I'd started to ride to work or the band stickers on my briefcase. The only negative comment I really got was a manager who told me I was not aloud to wear the sleeveless shirt to work without something else on top of it.

It was going anywhere else that caused a problem for me. I was a scrawny white boy, and I had the pale upper-arms to prove it. To just wear the sleeveless shirt was more embarrassing than the hair ever was. If the laughing and ridicule didn't get me, the simple fact that it was obvious I was faking was going to piss off someone with a real mullet soon enough.

But it did have it's fun moments. Going to the bar proved to be easy enough, as no one really seemed to notice. When they did, they looked at me, then the hair, and then laughed as they went to share the experience with their friends. Most of my friends got a big kick out of seeing me in public with it, and word spread pretty quickly among them.



The more I sported the mullet, the less I started to care about going out in public. It wasn't like I had changed in the least bit, and that was obvious enough to anyone who talked to me. While it might indeed look like I was itching to buy a Bitchin' Camaro, the honest truth was I was still trying to locate Tom Leher LPs in my spare time. You can change a man's hair, but you can't make him change his record collection (or his attitude) no matter how hard to try.

After the initial shock wore off, the next question I was always asked became more difficult to answer: "Why did you do it?" While The Betting Dollar™ explanation was the simplest, no one was every satisfied with it. "A bet? That's it?" I would try to give them the entire sorted story, about how I had always joked about it and needed to carry through to keep the joke alive, but even that seemed a bit thin when I'd voice it. It wasn't that it was hard for people to believe,



but when you do something as drastic as I'd done, it becomes even more important to have a good story to go with it. Was it an experiment? Was I going to start living the lifestyle too? Could they expect to find me in five years with a T-Top car, a wife pooping out kids, and a stack of concert-ticket stubs from my habit of following Metallica? How far was I going to go with it?

I didn't even know the answer to that.

And then, there were the painful days. The first time a couple of guys walking down the street pointed and laughed was funny enough for me. And then it kept happening. Every time I left the house. Even people in cars were pointing at me when they drove past. Occasionally I would forget about the mullet, only to be reminded when I'd try to smile at a girl and watch her cross the street while suppressing a giggle. No matter how thick my bad teenage moustache became, the option that I would get to cut my mullet when it was tickling some girl's face became less and less likely. Sure, it was fun to be that friend who'd done the one thing no one thought any of us was capable of doing. But soon enough it had become something else entirely. The feeling of alienation I'd suffered in High School was hitting me in the face every time I looked in the mirror. With a Mullet, no one looked at me and saw me. They only person they got to know in that time was The Mullet.

It had only been a week and a half. Punching myself in the face was less painful that this was.

I first received the bad news from my brother via e-mail: my grandfather on my dad's side had died. My step-mom called me the next morning to confirm that I'd heard, and soon enough we were all chatting on the phone in disbelief. My grandpa Chet was a tough guy, and I'd always respected him when I'd heard the

stories of what he'd done in his life. It was hard to think that someone that strong was gone. I took it pretty hard because I hadn't seen him in years. While I always had this plan in the back of my mind that I'd bus down to see him and my Grandma Mary when I could afford it, the truth was I was always saying I'd do it, "Next year." Who knew that it wouldn't always be a possibility?

It wasn't supposed to happen like that. I was supposed to see him again, to prove I had grown into someone. I was supposed to tell him that I'd gotten a job, was able to support myself, that I was following in this tradition of strong men in our family. And here I was, some bratty twenty-something with another bad haircut and a few tattoos. I never got to show him who I really was.

It wasn't supposed to happen like this it all.

A memorial service was being held the next week near Redding (CA), and there was little time to prepare. I made a lot of phone calls to my dad making sure I had the dates right so I could get time off from work and he'd arranged to rent a big van-type car so we could all make the journey. I packed pretty quickly and worked out all the details on my end. All that was left to do was cut the Mullet.

My roommates understood, so they agreed that I'd won the bet and they let me get it cut before I left. I had won, though extenuating circumstances aided that more than my actual performance during the bet. Still, I guess that wasn't the point. Having beaten Josh wasn't giving me the thrill that I thought it would have.

It was agreed that we had to do a final photo shoot, and Brian accommodated that easy enough by letting Kelly use his digital camera. It was fun enough, but it was much more relieving to get it all chopped off that night. The last thing I wanted to do was to

show up to a memorial service for my grandfather sporting some sort of cultural dissertation on social circles in hair form.

The service was good but exhausting, emotionally and physically. When I got back the only thing I wanted to do was sleep. Of course that wasn't an option. There was a house to clean, and job to attend, parties to arrange or go to, and a thousand other details of mundane life that required my attention. It seemed unfair to me that I had to put aside these feelings I was trying to work out and instead cope with all this unnecessary detail work. My whole life was made up of lame details. What I wanted more than anything was for the details to work themselves out so I could concentrate on the bigger picture and be happy.

But then again, who ever sees it that way? Everyone endlessly obsesses about shows and movies and records and clothes – and hair – in an attempt to give themselves some sort of common ground to work with when they go out in the world and meet people. The prevailing philosophy is that if everyone has some minor detail to fuss with, eventually the bigger picture will work itself out. I'm guilty of it too: I spent my whole life concerned with my hair, obsessing about records, hoarding comic books, and trying to stay culturally literate enough to carry on a conversation in public.

Immediately following my return, I bleached my hair again, only to dye it red a few weeks later. Before the end of the summer I had twin-fins, followed by a shaved head, and then later a little pair of red antenna. Still fussing, still trying to find the perfect haircut. Still obsessing with the details, still ignoring who I really am or what I really want. I'm no closer to being satisfied with my hair – or anything else for that matter – than I was in High School.

But somehow the world kept going anyway. There was no momentous, life changing perspective gained when I got back from the memorial service, nor did my hair magically become manageable (even with the pomade). Everything was still as awful as it had been before, except when I slap enough crap onto my head people don't look away from me when I walk down the street. I was guilty of the same thing, though. My whole life I have been too afraid to get to know people. Instead, I gaze from afar, attracted by something on the surface to avoid being hurt by what's on the inside. A simple defense mechanism that I can never dismantle.

They still don't know who I am, and they don't have to know I used to have a Mullet. They'll judge me on my appearance anyway like they always had, just like I'll only be interested in that girl with the glasses, sweater & tattoos. This was the hand that life had dealt me. I will always have to focus on the details, I will always be judged (or will judge) by what's on the surface; I will always worry about my hair.

Always dealing with the symptoms; never curing the condition.

THE ANGRIEST GRRRRRL IN THE WORLD

By Steve Koriagin ©2002

The woman who is so angry at the world, she can't sleep, she can't eat - she can barely even smoke. Bound so tightly with tension and caffeine, she approaches a state of rigor mortis.







Apologies to David Lynch.

The woman who is so angry at the world, she can't sleep, she can't eat - she can barely even smoke. Bound so tightly with tension and caffeine, she approaches a state of rigor mortis.







I am Joe's bad David Lynch parody.

/--\
| "What's It About." "Her." "Oh." |
\--/

"Am I angry enough? Am I crazy enough? Am I stupid enough? Am I lazy enough? Am I drunk enough? Do I flunk enough? Am I jealous enough? Am I selfish enough?"

--Nerf Herder "Bridge Under Troubled Water

So you broke my heart. And the world moved on. The hand that life dealt me. Sigh.

I've tried hard to ignore this. To let it go and move on. Everyone says It's not worth it, right? To let something take over your thoughts and block out everything else. Isn't the healthy thing to move on and let it become part of the past? Another failed relationship to add to the collection like comics or the empty bottles on my shelf?

Are you supposed to become another anecdote? Another story to tell at bars when people ask about the long face? Am I supposed to develop you into the character to write about? Another dumb 'zine nickname with a one-line throw-away joke that builds up to the part where you came over after work and laid down the words that hurt the most:

"We need to talk."

How many more times do I have to do this? How many more times am I going to give everything I have to anyone who wants to get close to me just so they can stab me in the ribs? I'm an open book to anyone who wants to read it. Everything about me is right there: my hopes, my dreams, my desires and aspirations. It's not that I force this on people, it's that I don't know how to be any

other way. Every time I think it's possible I try desperately to make a connection with the outside world. I just want to be happy, like everyone else.

Every day you break my heart over and over again. Every time your name comes up, it hurts like it's a fresh wound again. Every time I think about you or see your picture it's like the bottom dropped out, the carpet is gone, and I'm falling away from everything around me only to smash against the cement below. I look at the world around me and try to forget it, but everyone has your face. Everyone talks with your voice. Everyone talks about you.

You said I was probably the coolest person you ever dated. That's a reason to stay together more than anything else. But it's the same reason I've always gotten from everyone else, too. I'm always too nice, too friendly. I've never been the kind of guy that anyone wants to date. Why are people always breaking up with me if I'm so cool? Apparently I'm not as cool as the guy who's not as nice as me, the guy who you'll end up dating next.

You say it's time to stop hiding out and being miserable. You say it's time to move on. You say I need to rejoin the world and prove I can be as cool as I really am. But I never had to prove myself before when we started dating. The only person I want to prove myself to is you. You meant more to me that you can ever know. I want to prove to you I can be everything you need and anything you want. I would do that for you, if you'd let me.

You tell me I need to get over it. How can I? How can I get over something I can't forget? How can I get past all these little details that keep tripping me up? I keep hearing all these things in my head. You were thinking about leaving me before hand. It was in your head the last night I slept with you. No matter how hard I try, I can't forget these things. I can't forget every perfect

detail of you: your hair, your eyes, your lips, your face, your voice. No matter how much I drink, now matter how many times people tell me to get over it. I see these things every night when I sleep alone, and every morning when you're not there.

I was embarrassed when you asked me about my 'zine. How can I tell you that it's mostly about you? I wish meeting other people was as easy as you say it is. I try going out and everyone looks away from me. They can recognize your work a mile away. No matter how much crap I put in my hair, how much time I spend on my clothes, how much money I spend at the bar, no one can ignore the look of heartbreak. Like a giant searchlight, blinding everyone, making them turn away.

My friends tell me that they can't stand hanging out with me when I'm depressed. I find that pretty ironic. The one time anyone needs the support of his friends is when he's feeling down and out. I spend almost every night wondering what I've done that's so wrong that people won't even call me back.

I wish I could forget all of this. Most of the time I can't even think about other people. How can I when all I can think about is you? I don't want to forget the best person I've ever dated. I can't forget that you were the best sex I've ever had. I can never forget the way you felt, looked, or sounded. I can't forget all the things that we did together, all the things we planned to do together. I imagine the conversations we used to have and wish I could remember them better. No one ever talked to me the way you did. No one ever made me feel like they were actually listening.

When I used to look at you I felt like you were looking at me. You were the first person that made me feel attractive. You made me feel normal. You made me want to look my best. I quit smoking and cut back on my drinking because I thought that I didn't need that if I could have you.

I see a girl I don't know and I want to have a crush on them just to get you out of my head. Instead I think about the way you talk, how you used to say the word, "cute." All the times you would try to cut costs to save money. All the stuffed animals you had, the way your room looked when the lights were out and you were next to me. Its hard to forget these things when you spend every night in a huge bed alone.

I never met a person like you in my life. I told everyone for months about our first date. It *was* the best date I'd ever been on. I've never met a girl that liked music the way you did. I never met a girl that liked comics. Never met a girl that seemed like a perfect match for me. When we slept together, it was like no other time in my life. No one else is going to be like you, no one else will ever take the place in my heart that you have. You tell me that you're no one special. How can I make you understand: You're more special to me than anyone I've ever met.

I wish you knew how much this hurts. I wish you knew what I am feeling. I wish I could tell you so you could understand. I wish I still had you. I wish I had said the right things when we were together. I never told you how I felt because I thought you would just know. It never occurred to me that I should have said something. I haven't said those kinds of things to anyone in years. There would have been a whole future ahead of us better than you can imagine if you would have let it happen. I would have done anything for you. You had every quality I've always wanted in a partner. I've spent my whole life wishing for a girl like you.

I would give everything up to change the past. I would write every word there was for you. I would learn any craft for you. I would say everything you wanted to hear. I would learn to cook just for you. I would learn to drive so I could take you anywhere you wanted to go. I would call you just to hear your voice. I

would do anything to win your heart. I would never lie to you. I would never look at other girls. I would tell you every secret I had. I would give up every vice. I would give you any gift you wanted. All you would have to do is ask. I would be there for you in thick and thin. I would be any kind of person you wanted.

I would do anything if it meant I didn't have to hurt anymore.

That's why it's so hard to see you. That's why it's so hard to talk to you. When I see your face I think of all the things I remember from the nights we spent together. I see your silhouette and your hair and your eyes. I think of how soft your skin was and how I wanted to kiss you everywhere until you knew what I was thinking. Until I didn't have to talk any more because we were connected through our eyes. I think of all the times I woke up just to see you. To be reassured that you were there, if I needed you, for whatever insecurity that was plaguing me. When I hear your voice I remember the one thing that you said that meant the most to me: "You're the kind of person I could fall for." It melted the wall I've built around my heart. It made me feel a way I only imagined people could feel about each other. Something I'd seen in a movie, or read about in a book. I didn't think it would ever happen to me. I didn't think it was possible in real life.

I wish you knew how much this hurts. Imagine all the books you've ever read. Imagine how they all had parts that you liked, scenes and characters and dialog that was good, but other parts that were just bland and frustrating to get through. Imagine that you found a book that had everything. It had all the characters that you liked, all the background and scenes that really made the story compelling, and the sharpest dialog you've ever read. Imagine that there is no part of the book that you didn't like. Imagine enjoying the book while you were reading it. Imagine telling everyone you know that you are reading the best book you've ever encountered,

and probably never will again.

Imagine what it's like when it's over.

Every time I talk to someone I want them to prove me wrong. I want to hear about how horrible you treated me. I want them to point out how we fought all the time, how you couldn't stand my annoying habits. I want them to reveal some secret about how you cheated on me or how you lied to me. I want to find some of my stuff missing so I can say that you stole it. I want to run through the checklist of all the shittiest things all my exes did to me and blame you for all of them. But there's nothing. The worst thing you ever did to me is break my heart.

I guess that was enough.

Everyone says how great you are. Everyone compliments you, says that you're an amazing person and fun to hang out with. Everyone just keeps on telling me everything I already know; no one can deny that I lost the best girl I've ever dated.

Especially not myself.

I don't want to keep doing this. I don't want to keep staying up late and pounding my head trying to get this stuff out. I want to feel good about myself again. I want to know that when I wake up that everything is going to be okay. I want to feel like people aren't keeping secrets from me and avoiding me. I want to write and feel like it's actually worth something instead of some rehash of how much I miss you. I want to feel like I'm not alone in this world. I want my friends to stop avoiding me. I want to leave the house and feel like there's something I should be doing.

I just want to be happy again like when I was with you.

/----------\
| "Always The Young Radical" |
\----------/

*"**Inside Talent** is a gallery of writing, art and other expressions from the talented crew at _____.*

*"To submit, write out or type up your poem, short short story, essay, book or movie review, recipe or other writing. Make sure it's legible. Drop it off in the **Inside** box, located just inside the Computer Room. Remember we are limited by printing space, so don't send in your novel. We have access to a scanner, so we can scan your homemade art in as well... remember we are limited to grayscale in printing.*

"As editor, I try in every way to avoid editing or otherwise changing submissions. Like the corporation we work for, I don't feel I have the right to 'censor the reading tastes of the public.' Therefore, I will not alter language without the permission of the author.

"Reader's discretion is always advised."

And that was all it took. I mean, who wouldn't be inspired?

It's no big secret that I was really dissatisfied with my job. It had been that way for quite some time, and while I wouldn't say that I was ever getting any closer to suddenly learning to cope with this hardship, I will say that I got used to waking up in the morning and screaming because I suddenly remembered where I had to go that day.

The place was just awful. Not that I hated the actual job part of the job; I love working with books and CDs and customers, helping them find things they're looking for, setting up displays of product I can stand behind, etc. I love all that shit. Give me a

stack of DVDs that I don't detest and some shelf space to set up and I'm in for a decent hour of work. If a customer comes up and needs help finding something, piece of cake. I can handle all of that shit with a smile on my face the whole time. If the pace is relaxed and I can actually *do* my job, I would have never complained about that shit hole in the first place.

But that was rarely the case. I no more got to do my job than penguins get a chance to fly. There was constant bureaucratic bullshit going on, and when that's over there's plenty of paperwork to sift through and corporate guidelines to follow. It's not that they didn't want me set up that display of DVDs; rather, they would prefer that some stockholder in New York decide how and what should be set up on a shelf 3,000 miles away that they've never seen in a store that they've never been to. We got more idiotic e-mail than your average cubical dwellers, but in their case it's actually part of the job description.

And if that weren't enough, then there was the local management. Three of the managers that work there are so completely inept and useless that they compensate by sticking their noses into everything (or, when that doesn't work, by ignoring the problems completely). I dubbed two of them "The Ogre" and "The Troll" because of their personality qualities that resemble those mythical characters. When they are together, I refer to them as, "The Rash," because you are always thankful when they go away. The third is just a putz; so jaded and cynical about the retail business that he no longer cares. At least he has his reasons: he was dicked out of a position that was rightfully his so The Rash could move in and cause some trouble.

Fortunately I was not really alone in my thinking. A good portion of the staff agreed and has their own particular beefs with the local management (though maybe not as strong as my own). I

often mentioned to them that I thought all of my job woes could easily enough be solved with three bullets. Most of them thought that was a bit extreme. I often felt like it wasn't extreme enough. Can you actually kill monsters of that nature with a mere bullet? Who's to say? Still, it was nice to have a lot of people on your side, even if they're not into killing. When you are pissed off and hate-filled about your job, it's important to have a lot of people sinking on the same tanker full of oil that you are.

Normally I wouldn't have fallen for stunts like the "Inside Talent" crap. But it seemed pretty legit. The Editor of the Newsletter that "Inside Talent" was a part of was a pretty cool guy, and I've often caught him expressing an anti-company sentiment when The Rash was decidedly absent. It was the bit about censoring that really caught my attention. I'd dealt with a lot of censorship issues when I first starting publishing magazines in High School. It was a pivotal experience in my life to have to deal with a topic that I knew I was against but had never encountered before. I hold my anti-censorship views as closely to my person as I can and in many ways it's helped define me quite a bit.

If this "Inside Talent" thing was going to actually give me free reign with something I submitted, then I was going to take advantage of it at my first opportunity. Why not? It would at least be interesting and, not to be too modest, funny as well. I threw caution to the wind and got to work immediately.

After a couple of weeks of brainstorming I finally managed to string together a series of words that I felt would be perfect for the Newsletter. Since I worked in the Music Department, and since it was a Company Newsletter, it only made sense that a satirical piece about Top-Selling CDs would not only be perfect, but almost inevitable. I ran off a copy and delivered it to the Newsletter box immediately:

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Top-Selling Music Department CDs[1]

Compiled by Austin Rich (special thanks to Steve & Glenn)

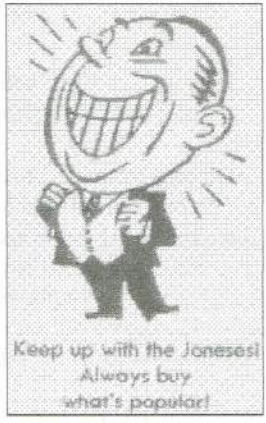
Greetings from the Music Department! While many of you are aware that our sales in Music are booming, I've come to learn that the majority of the Bookside employees are unaware of the titles of Top-Selling CDs. It is vitally important that you, as a _____ employee, at least know about our top selling albums. Here's our current Top 10 list, with a brief summary you can use to inform our customers about the artists in question.

10. Marilyn Hanson *We're in Jr. High, and We've Got Fishnets*

Hot on the heels of their hit single, "Mmm... Satan!" Marilyn Hanson has launched a 35-city tour of the United States. Publicity has been quite good for the three devil worshippers, as half of their shows are being cancelled because of parental complaints. The remaining cities have laws preventing their albums from even being sold. To further complicate matters, Marilyn Hanson's management and record label are currently trying to reach a

[1] The following Text is reproduced from the Company Newsletter, as edited by The Editor. There were one or two changes that I made to this version of the text to fix the occasional type-o and improve the flow of sentences that were not working. But 99.99% of the text is unchanged from what was seen in the Newsletter when it was first printed. Just for the record, in case anyone gets anal and compares the two. You've been warned. Also, the clip art icons & captions were all done by The Editor. I think they're pretty damn funny if you ask me.

compromise on what the group can and can't do for the stage show when the tour finally gets underway. On the list of nixed ideas: cocaine snorting cage dancers, live pig-slaughter, and a note-for-note cover of Susan Lucci's rendition of "Someone to Watch Over Me," performed in full drag with the youngest Hanson brother drumming in the nude. While the odds of the group actually playing live at any point in the future are almost nil, _____ is proud to carry this album in stores nationwide, quickly and effectively delivering this collection of blasphemous tunes into the eager hands of underage buyers.



9. Deadheads Can't Dance

Smokin' the Resin: A Greatest Hit (he he) Collection

This 2-disc collection, compiled by the band themselves, covers all forty years of the group's drug-hazed career. (It also, strangely enough, includes several tracks from their albums recorded in the mid-70's – a period none of the band remembers personally. Interviews with the group reveal that they all believed the band was broken up during this time, in spite of the fact that they released four albums during those years.) While the songs themselves are of uneven quality, this is of no real surprise to longtime fans. Drugs being the only things this band does consistently, the disk seems to have been sequenced while the band was under the influence of something. Longtime fans have protested against the

album's release considering that every single original member of the band has died of a drug overdose and has subsequently been replaced... several times over in some cases. They claim the newer material (from 1980 on) has a certain "watered-down quality" and should not have been included in the collection, since it "ruins the entire set." However, brainless Yuppies are shelling out $40 to pick it up (only $36 with your discount card!), the same Yuppies that come back year after year and ditch their suits for a hit of windowpane and a few hours of freaky solace when the band comes through town. A perfect gift for anyone wearing a hemp necklace, even if they aren't old enough to know who this band is, but thinks the music is, "Like... uhm... maaaannn..."

8. The Fucking Fuckers *Fuck You, You Fuckin' Fuck*

Recent pressure from their label made it next to impossible for this band to release this album, the follow-up to *Shitty Fuckin' Fuck Anyway, Fuckface*, recorded under the original (longer) moniker, The Fucking Peckerwood Motherfuckers, Fuckwad. After a long argument with their label, they finally agreed to their new (shortened) name and set to work immediately on this, their magnum opus to date. (In the interim, the group chose to show their ethical high-ground by throwing a metaphorical "middle finger" at their label, when they recorded a "throw-away" album, with each band member using a pseudonym. The result was the classic, *Fucking Shit The Fucking Shit, Shitfuck*, under the group name, The Shitty Shitters, a lesser work but still essential to longtime fans). What was finally released on this newest record is 12 amazing pop songs, finely crafted with beautiful harmonies and top-notch production values – everything you've come to expect from this award-winning (though quizzically disgustingly named)

group. As you may well know, The Fucking Fuckers are the only band with profanity in their name to win a Grammy®, and many radio stations have now taken to playing their music anyway after a long-standing ban, though they still can't say the group's name or the song titles on air and the average track, after censors, sounds a lot like a test for the Emergency Broadcast System. The group is currently under more pressure from their label to, yet again, change their name in spite of the awards and acclaim the group has earned. They responded by suggesting the (again shortened) name, The Fuckers.



*7. **Mary-Kate & Ashley Olsen** 2 Get Her 4 Eva*

Having grown tired of the public image associated with them over the years, the Olsen Twins have given up being good-girls in lieu of a time-tested pop standard: The Puritan Slut. With both belly-buttons a-blazin', the Twins have an album's worth of sexual innuendo cleverly masked in what they claim to be lyrics about wanting to "just have fun." To help promote the album, the Olsen Twins have also made several music videos that are already getting plenty of airplay on MTV, where the numerous breast-shots, lewd crotch-oriented gestures and explicit background sexual imagery has catapulted these videos to the first through tenth positions on "Total Request Live." In interviews, the Twins claim that all the fuss is for naught. While it may seem like they're singing about

sex, they claim that it's much more mundane. However, it's hard to misinterpret lyrics like, "I want you inside me baby / It feels better that way / I'm tired of playin' with it / You understand what I say?" The all-to-obvious single, "2 Get Her 4 Eva" is so explicit in fact that the video, shot with the Twins naked, wrapped in sheets, singing lines to each other like, "Hand in hand / We're birds of a feather / Touch me again / And we'll be together forever," has caused quite a bit of controversy amongst worried mothers. (No fathers have yet voiced a single complaint.)

6. Black Izod
Journey To The Center of Planet Izod

With King Crimson getting publicity again after their recent tour with Tool, it appears that our worst nightmares are true: Prog Rock is back. Leading the way is the group Black Izod, as diverse regionally as they are musically (the band sports members from all seven continents, including Antarctica). Their first (and so far only) album is the three-disc set, *Journey To The Center of Planet Izod*, an album with more vague cultural references than your average Bloodhound Gang record (a good portion of the album's "story" takes place within the confines of a Tardis). The album clocks in at just under 4 hours; no reviewers or fans have been able to yet listen to the entire thing. The story, as near as anyone can tell, involves a group of weary space travelers trying to start society over again in the underground caves of the far-off "Planet Izod." While it is unclear if the group actually has any connection to the clothing manufacturer of the same name, there is an alligator mentioned at the 6:14 mark of Track 3 on the second disc, causing a huge buzz among fans who are digging deeper into the album for more clues. The band has already begun their first tour, but has

not fared as well live as they do in recordings. In fact, they have yet to complete a single show; the band has taken to stopping just after two hours, when the last attendee gives up and leaves without requesting their money back. But the band has more confidence concerning the European leg of the tour, where audiences have more patience for arty nonsense that lasts six solid hours.

5. PMRC Re-Issue: 2 Live Crew
As Nasty As They Wanna Be

With the success of their previous re-issue (Mercyful Fate's *Don't Break the Oath*), the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC) has delivered another top notch remastering with this 2 Live Crew album. Released on a gold disc for superior sound quality, the PMRC went to the master tapes themselves so each track could be digitally remastered in an attempt to faithfully preserve the sound as the band intended it. Every track has been cleaned up and brought to life in a way that sounds fresh without ruining the vitality or feel of the original release. Finally, studio outtakes, b-side singles and alternate mixes of tracks have been included under the band's supervision, thus creating the ultimate version of *As Nasty As They Wanna Be*. Though the PMRC has come under fire recently by the Christian Right groups that fund them, Tipper Gore herself was quoted as saying, "My work with the PMRC is to help inform parents about the content and quality of the music available to their children. With my Re-Issue Series, I'm hoping ideas like censorship – especially in the form of warning labels on records – becomes a thing of the past." Dee Snyder of the band Twisted Sister was quoted as saying, "I'm really scared, dude."

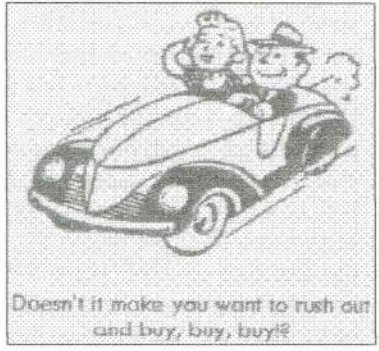
*4. **Journey / Toto / Rush / Boston / Foreigner / Styx / Foghat / Asia** One Last Time!*

Considering most of these dinosaurs of rock have long since outlived their usefulness as a viable commodity in the music market, and in light of how the segment of sales based on so-called "rock" albums has long since strayed away from these bands' styles and genres, it's odd to find these fossils even trying to perform as a group, let alone release an album. Even more baffling is the fact that this album has actually sold enough to keep it in the marketplace at all, besides the curious fact that it scored so favorable (or at all) in our Top 10. But payola and illogic aside, this album sounds no different than you would expect a release to sound by these bands (if you were to play all their albums simultaneously). The added bonus that every member of all these bands actually performs on each cut helps the fan, allowing the buyer to purchase one album when they previously needed eight. As all the songs sound the same anyway, many people have opted to instead buy the single from this album, also titled "One Last Time!" which has received enough airplay to warrant having the super group to – you guessed it – tour again. This actually works out to the band's advantage; most of the band members have not had any income in many years and are desperate for a chance to line their pockets with money. However, most of the band members are so old that a full concert is too much to handle at once. They have subsequently taken to alternating members between songs, which also doubles as a way of keeping the stage less crowded for performances. Most of the artists involved with the tour are very excited about having groupies again, but considering that sex, drugs and heart-attacks are claiming at least one member of the group each week, they are having serious

doubts about a follow-up album. Makes a perfect gift for any father who spends far too much time in the garage with his Thunderbird.

3. Five Piece Boy Band #657 *We're Not In Rehab Yet*

After Warner Bros.' big failure with Five Piece Boy Band #656, a band who fell apart before their first single could be pirated in MP3 format on Audiogalaxy, let only get released, the execs re-tooled their formula in an attempt to create the next big boy band. The perfect blend of male models, tattoos, hip haircuts, designer clothes, choreography, soulless pop music and inane lyrics are necessary for success... and finally they hit the jackpot. The result is Five Piece Boy Band #657. And their first single, *Born 2 Be Your Baby [Dance Re-Mix Version]* was such a success on the club circuit that the band's final line-up was rushed by the execs to be completed in time for the album's release. Debuting at #3, *We're Not In Rehab Yet* contains as much sterile sounding pop rock as it does meaningless modern euphemisms and catch phrases. Their first video (filmed on the set left over from the failed attempt of a video shoot for Five Piece Boy Band #598) has gathered favorable responses from the MTV crowd and, if all goes well, a national tour could be underway soon enough, with an unconfirmed opening slot for 'N-Sync. Warner Bros. execs are confident that Five Piece Boy Band #657 has performed


Doesn't it make you want to rush out and buy, buy, buy!?

well enough in test markets for at least a two year sales run, but makes no promises for future solo careers for individual members of the band, nor for a comeback tour in 2015.

2. ***Fashion Glasses*** *Thrift Score*

Since Indie Rock failed to deliver the promises it made and completely fell apart as a viable genre capable of surviving on its own terms, the floodgates have opened wide for imitators and knock-off versions of the real thing. One such band, Fashion Glasses, has actually done well enough for themselves to get a single out of the deal ("Sweater Girl") and made enough money off the whole affair to upgrade from their junky van to a plush tour bus. But success has not changed these sellouts one bit; they still claim Portland, Oregon as their hometown in interviews (though only long enough to make some back-biting comment) and their cynicism toward the music industry has not faltered in the least (especially after the new line of black-framed glasses they've started selling at Hot Topic). While *Thrift Score* pales in comparison to the lyrical content of their previous albums (*Speeding Toward Disasterland* and *She Broke Up With Me and This Album's About Her*), it perfectly encapsulates the Indie Rock lifestyle with lyrical references to smaller and more pathetic venues, long-since out-of-print 'zines, bands so obscure they are more likely than not fabricated, hanging out at the library, as well as self-debasing comments about what losers they really are (ironically enough, the comments are completely true). While not once saying anything meaningful or interesting, they still have plenty of ripped-off guitar chords and progressions you've more likely than not heard on a Built To Spill album, or possibly even a b-side by Modest Mouse. Perfect for that person you know who

longs to set themselves apart from the crowd so desperately they'll take to pretending to have a genetic deficiency to do so.

*1. **Demographic** #1 Albums Available In Stores*

Scientifically proven to be loved and enjoyed by 73.6% of the US population*, Demographic is still the #1 selling album for the 50th week solid. Leaving nothing to chance, Demographic prefers to depend entirely on market research for their choice in musical direction, making them the first band to have a board of directors, a legal department, researchers and flunky employees working in cubicles to help create Demographic's music. Each song is made from the ground up by groups of people, taking all creativity out of writing music and lyrics. Since no one aspect of the song is written by any less than three people, the result is something so lifeless and inoffensive as to be almost completely uninteresting (which is probably why it sells so well in our store). Demographic's board of directors – the people who take credit for the songs researched and written by their underlings – have been rather successful with their product of late. They hope to advance to the next stage of music production, something they refer to as "mobile performance task force delegation." Their t-shirts have, apparently, tested well with many focus groups and may soon be available for fans to act as walking billboards for this evil corporate entity. Until then, you can find their albums at your nearest evil corporate entity, _____.

** Margin of error: +/- 12%*

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What can I say? I was never that good at being subtle anyway.

Okay, so it does kind of hammer the point home. I would even go so far as to say that, toward the end, the joke is wearing a bit thin. Yes, the music industry sucks. Yes, bands seem more like a joke trying to gain fame and money over making music they enjoy. Parts of it even feels a bit ripped off from other stuff I've already written and heavily influenced by other humorous stuff I've read that was in a similar vein. C'est la vie. (I imagine a lot of authors get that feeling too, when they are taking the same number of finite words the English language contains and then attempt to string them together in a new, as-yet-unseen way. Goes with the territory, I guess.)

Were there specific types of bands I was mocking? Oh yes. For the most part I tried to poke fun at my own interests (I probably own one of everything from the above list in one real permutation or another). And yes, mocking my own town (Portland) did seem a bit cruel, but if you can't laugh at yourself or your surroundings, what's the point?

Regardless, I felt like it was pretty well polished and ready to go. It was the first thing I'd written in almost six months, and I really needed to just get it over with and see where it would go. The cards were on the table and it was time to play my hand.

I was pretty nervous when I gave it to The Editor. Thinking that the piece would be cut to ribbons before it was even given a chance to see print, I warned him that it might just be a little too over the top. I made a lot of suggestions for taking things out, going so far as to suggest that he pick the five least offensive ones and we just run those. But when I came in the next day and talked to him again, he told me there was nothing to worry about. Not only did he like the piece, but he also thought it was totally appropriate and funny to boot (success!). He went ahead and

prepared the entire piece for print. I was actually pretty excited about this, because not only had it been a while since I'd written anything in the first place, but it had been much longer since I'd seen something of mine printed somewhere that I didn't put together.

I waited patiently to see the results.

My weekend just happened to begin the day the Newsletter came out, which was a mere coincidence for the most part (the days just lined up that way). Over the weekend I'd caught wind of something happening at work while I was gone. Apparently the Newsletter hadn't gone over very well. Fortunately The Design Pirate had forwarded a copy to me, so I got to see the finished product before I went back to work. It looked great to me. What could possibly be wrong with it?

When I did get back, the Newsletter was gone. Completely, without a trace. There were no managers around to question about it and the staff knew no more than I did. I got a few compliments on the piece, and then a few questions too. ("Where's the Newsletter? I didn't get a copy before they disappeared.") Something was rotten in Denmark.

Eventually the Ogre showed up, so I figured that it was probably time for "The Talk". She was probably going to tell me something about how the piece was inappropriate and that she decided to pull the Newsletter based on this. I was prepared for this moment and I sharpened my retorts to a razor's edge. But while I was preparing, she did nothing. She didn't mention my name, never asked to talk to me, and certainly made no mention of the Newsletter.

Curious. What was going on here?

Eventually word of mouth filled me in on what had gone down earlier. Apparently the Newsletter was put out for one single day

until The Ogre saw what was in it. Immediately she pulled them all and swept the mess under the rug until she could talk to The Editor. She made her point very concisely when she finally did talk to him: Make The Following Changes. No ifs, ands or buts.

While I was fuming and waiting for The Ogre to make her move, The Editor came to me and informed me of the changes that The Ogre was forcing him to make. As I predicted, it was "The Fucking Fuckers" segment.

Originally I'd suggested we could use censor marks on that piece as I'd pre-cognitively sensed that it would be the most difficult part to swallow. After we talked about it we decided that doing that would actually reverse the entire point of the piece. The "joke" was that even though this band had chosen the most vulgar name they could think of, they were such a phenomenally good band that their music transcended the vulgarity of the words that were representative of it, thus (hopefully) breaking down the stigmas attached to such language. The point being that, if people can learn to accept these words, the world would be a better place. By using censor marks in the piece, we would have admitted up front that those words were in fact so vulgar that it was pointless to try and get over the stigma and instead hide behind vague censor marks, thus making the entire "joke" ineffectual (at best).

So now The Ogre was forcing us to *use* the censor marks, which not only destroyed the whole impact of the "joke", but added a new dimension to it: because of the changes she had made, the piece was now poking fun at her, not this band. She was the one who could not stand the language used and refused to see any other substance in the writing. Though it was not the intent of the piece, the "changed" version was now a lot funnier to The Editor and me.

The other change that she required was the elimination of the word "evil" in the sentence, "Until then, you can find their

albums at your nearest evil corporate entity, _____." (This was in the "Demographic" piece.) I had originally waffled on the idea of using that particular word in the first place. But after thinking about it I figured that when you're on a roll, just go for it. First, it was funny. Second, it added a new ludicrous aspect to the entire piece: no company on the planet would ever admit that they were "evil" in any sense of the word. And yet here it was, in this piece about top selling albums. The odds that anyone would see this as a real piece of corporate double-speak were completely laughably. Adding this "ludicrous" dimension to the entire piece is like revealing at the end of the movie that it was all just a dream. "Everything you've just read is a huge joke, hope you enjoyed it." Lastly, it seemed wholly appropriate to me, and reflected my own opinion in the first place. Sometimes you just have to let your voice be heard.

Of course, at this point, my voice *wasn't* being heard. She still refused to talk to me about the entire subject, even though we had worked together every day since I'd come back to work. Even though The Editor made the changes, printed a new run of the Newsletter, and put them out to be read, she still wouldn't talk to me about it. I began letting the other managers know that I would like to discuss the subject with her at some point. They passed along the message.

A week went by.

I was pretty angry by this point. Not only had she insulted me by pulling the piece and then forcing The Editor to change it, she was now avoiding the issue entirely by not even opening the subject up for debate. Apparently it was much easier to let it die than to even discuss it. While I had a lot to say on the subject in the hopes of making a difference, change can't really be affected when no one will let you speak.

Finally she bit the bullet and asked if we could have a chat (as if it was her idea or something). We left the store grounds and sat in the hallway outside the mall for our conversation. I was nervous as hell, and with good reason: here was the enemy, plain and simple. Not only was she intimidating because of her power as the store manager, but she had squelched my attempts to say what I wanted to say in a way that I felt comfortable. Then she ignored me. It's not easy to create an open line of communication with someone who doesn't agree with you, who's open about that fact, and furthermore doesn't really want to hear what you have to say in the first place. I spent most of the conversation looking at my shoes and sighing a lot.

I had several main points I wanted to make to her, and over the course of the conversation I managed to make most of them:

- The piece was, in fact satire. In using that as a mode of writing, I was therefore allowed certain liberties that you can't get away with in other writing. People have been fighting this point as long as satire has been around, but the sad truth is that as long as we live in a world as silly as our own, there will always be people who are there to poke fun of it any way they can. Satirical writing, music and art have always persevered and have almost always been protected from censorship. Period. (Her response was that it didn't matter what kind of writing it was, but that to her it was inappropriate. End of story.)
- Her actions were hypocritical and unethical to the way that our company has operated as long as it's been around. The corporate stance toward any controversial writing of any kind has always been that censorship is not allowed, period. (Look

it up! It's part of our Mission Statement.) Our store may not stock selected titles, but we will always order in those titles for curious customers. If, however the controversial material is considered acceptable locally (i.e. Playboy, Penthouse, etc.), we will stock it in accordance with local standards and tastes. Since a majority of the staff had shown interest in the piece I wrote, an environment had been created where this controversial material was completely acceptable. (Her response: Because the material was inappropriate it needed to be removed from the break room where other members of the staff could see it. As a representative of the company, it is her job to protect the rest of the staff from anything of that nature.)

- It isn't her place to decide what people should and shouldn't be reading. While we are at work, and while it is a work environment that spawned the Newsletter, a precedent was set with the first issue by stating that Reader Discretion was advised and that we would not censor for any reason whatsoever. Furthermore, other controversial material had been printed before without any complaints, some of which was just as "vulgar" as my own writing. The point of the Newsletter was to allow those who were interested to have something to read. The bottom line is: People should be able to make their own decisions for themselves concerning what they choose to read. (Her response: It *was* her place to decide what people can and can't read in the Newsletter, because it was inappropriate.)
- Because of what had happened, the staff's relationship with her had changed quite a bit. Our level of trust is now severely diminished. How can we feel we are acting with the best of intentions when our own Store Manager breaks not only

company policies, but goes against the very laws Bookstores are supposed to protect? The conflict of interest here is pretty much the entire issue. How can someone managing a business whose sole purpose is to distribute artistic forms of free speech perform this act of censorship? Who's to say what other books or CDs are removed from the sales floor if the Store Manager finds it inappropriate? (Her response: there was no reason for me to have stopped trusting her, period.)

A lot more was said, but I can't remember the entire conversation verbatim. I can only paraphrase. To her, this wasn't a discussion, but a chance to state the facts as she saw them:

- What she did she had to do as a representative of the company.
- What I'd written was inappropriate in any context.
- In regards to her not talking to me for so long, she claimed she had no idea that I'd written it, thinking that I was contributing to something The Editor had put together. (This was a flat-out lie, as my name was clearly the one listed as having put it together, while I gave thanks to two contributors in very obvious parenthesis).
- Regardless of the fact that she claims to be liberal, and even though she is aware of the irony of her forcing these changes on this particular piece of writing, and regardless of the fact that no one else who works in her store feels that what she did was "right", because the piece was inappropriate it had to be censored and changed. End of story. (Notice a trend in the way she talks?)

And this was the heart of the matter. She felt as if she was

looking out for interests, protecting those who could not protect themselves. She patronized the rest of the staff and myself by coming out and saying that we would not be able to prevent these horrible words I'd written from causing no end of trouble, and that it was her job to protect us from them. No matter how hard I tried to show her that her actions were hypocritical to her stated "liberal" views, she insisted that she was the hero and I was a villain over and over again.

We were finally interrupted when I noticed a girl trying to steal something from our store, and while I wanted to continue pointing out how she had made a big mistake, to her the discussion was over. She had made her points, invalidated my own and decided that there was nothing left to discuss. I tried to express to her that I didn't feel like anything had been resolved, but she insisted there was nothing else to be said.

And that was it. She disappeared into her office and I returned to the Music Department, very, *very* pissed.

Not too much later the Newsletters disappeared completely. The Editor never really mentioned to me what had happened, but the implication was pretty clear: if we were going to abuse the Newsletter with leftist viewpoints, we would not be aloud to have a Newsletter at all. Apparently, the corporate motto is, "Avoidance as a way of dealing with issues." Or rather, "We Listen, we just don't do anything about it."

I contacted the District Manager of the store and asked for a meeting with her, bringing up all the same points I'd brought up tc The Ogre, but it was fruitless. Rather than see my point of view, she agreed with The Ogre's decision to be rid of the Newsletter completely. The only thing she did concede was that it was wrong to have kept me in the dark for so long. While I was beginning to

feel like I had tried everything I could, the fact was that I had lost the battle of integrity in a wave of bureaucracy and bullshit.

It wasn't long before it seemed that everyone had completely forgotten the whole ordeal. But I didn't.

On Monday, June 10th I was fired. The official reason was that I had failed to discuss with a manager my decision to clock in early on three separate occasions. There had been no prior implication of termination when the subject had come up in the past. There had been no paper trail that pointed to my "poor behavior". Even though nearly every other staff member is guilty of the exact same thing, I was the only one to be punished for it.

When I tried to discuss the matter with The Ogre I got the same kind of treatment I'd gotten before. She had made the decision that what I'd done was wrong, and no amount of reason on my part would change her mind. She'd probably made this decision long ago, when we first met. She'd been waiting for a reason to can me after our first conversation, where I second-guessed the first decision she made concerning my future in the company. During that first conversation, I insisted that I could handle more responsibility than she was willing to give me. She disagreed. From that day on she was waiting to fire me.

I guess there had been some warning signs along the way, but I didn't notice them. The Friday before she fired me we'd had another conversation regarding some mundane aspect of my job that no one else had ever gotten in trouble for. I told her that she really made me feel uncomfortable. I said that I felt intimidated by her because she was always discussing "behavior problems" with me that other people got away with. I said that I felt as if she was exerting power over me not because I needed management, but because she wanted to show me who was, ultimately, in charge.

And she did, by firing me.

She had cash waiting for me that was the sum total of my last check I was supposed to receive later that week. She had a document she'd written up relating what I'd done wrong and she had already signed it. She was smiling the whole time. She had been fantasizing about that day for months.

The aftermath was pretty unbearable. She immediately left for a two-week vacation to avoid having to talk to anyone about it. She lied to the remainder of the staff, composing a note stating that she wished the best for my in my future. She praised my performance in the note, even though she'd made it pretty clear that she was never satisfied when she went ahead and fired me. It wouldn't be the first time she'd lied to me or anyone else that worked at that store and it wouldn't be the last I'm sure.

But who got the last laugh? Me? Maybe. Yeah, I may have been "right" the whole time. I may have stood by my guns no matter what the consequences were. I may have most of the remaining staff standing behind me on this issue. But at the end of the day, who sleeps more soundly? She's eliminated her worst enemy at work. She gets a pat on the back for good management. At the end of the day she gets to come home and relax secure in the knowledge that she still has her job, that she can still pay her bills.

She will be able to coast through life and get away with whatever she wants, because no one will ever fight her. And when they do, they will loose. She can afford to make things up, have them approved by her boss, and fire the biggest pain in her ass. Meanwhile, all I can afford to do is stand in line at the Unemployment office, hoping they'll give me benefits.

Yeah, it was retail, but I'd been there long enough to see the shift from that kind of mindset to the one I ended up in. Corporate America: where the needs of the stockholders outweigh those of

the employees that make them money. I gave six years of my life to that Bookstore, working hard, trying to prove to someone that I cared enough to get a small yearly raise. My first job ever was in my mom's Bookstore. It was the only job I ever thought I could do well. Before that, I could barely keep a job for more than six months. On that kind of timeline, six years is almost an eternity.

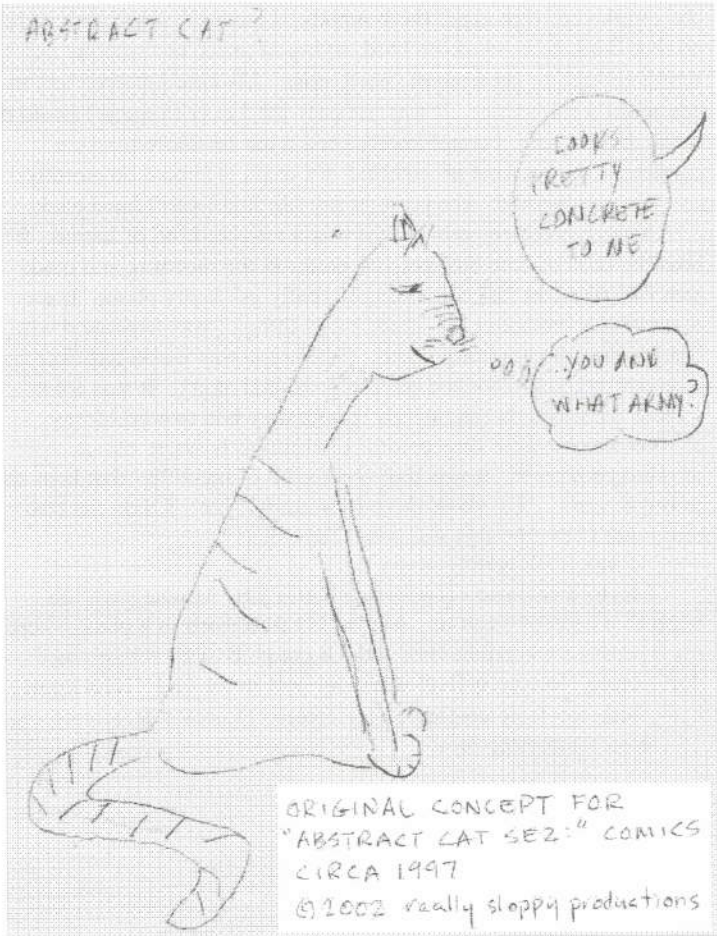
Gone. Wasted. Six years of my life that I can't have back.

Sure, I hated my job. But it was a reliable kind of hatred. It was the kind of hate that got you going in the morning and made you feel like you had something to really get angry about. It was symbolic, a metaphor for all the other things I was frustrated with but couldn't do anything about. Nothing in this world has ever changed without someone getting good and angry. It was John Cleese who said that the whole reason they had to stop Monty Python was because they couldn't get properly angry about anything anymore. It was that same kind of mentality that kept me going at work. "I'll show them how angry I am! I'll do the best damn job I can possibly do! Ha! Take that!"

So much for getting angry.

Maybe I will end up getting a better job. Maybe I will be happier wherever I end up. Maybe I'll find work in a place where my boss isn't a horrible cunt and I'll get paid to do something I don't mind. Maybe it'll all work out best in the end. Who knows? I'm a little too busy writing a new resume to give a decent answer.

Who's laughing now?


ABSTRACT CAT
LOOK'S PRETTY CONCRETE TO ME
YOU AND WHAT ARMY?
ORIGINAL CONCEPT FOR "ABSTRACT CAT SEZ:" COMICS CIRCA 1997
©2002 really sloppy productions

Everything Falls Apart

"I've been here a couple of times, and pretty much I've decided everyone is a lonely, miserable do-nothing compensating for a mediocre high school experience."
"Well, duh."

– Graffiti Found In The Men's Room At The Blackbird

It all started with Josh, really. It all became a bit unbearable for him, and with good reason. He'd been through a lot of shit in the last few months and came to the conclusion that it was time to get out while the getting's good. I don't blame him. You can only put up with roommates for so long before you really need to just wing it alone. While I wish he hadn't left, there was nothing I could do to stop him. Before long he was out of Fort Awesome and had given us a full month's worth of extra rent to help us fill his room. I'd like to say I wished him well, but at the time I was furious.

How dare he? We'd been the only two to stick together in the house since we moved in. All that time he'd spent saying how he didn't want the house to fall apart, about how he would do whatever it took to keep it all together. Now this? How could he abandon me like that? I felt used and betrayed. I felt alone. I felt like I needed a drink.

But I couldn't afford that, really. Nor could I reasonably stay angry with him. It wasn't his fault, and even if I wanted to be mad at him the truth was I had no right. He'd done more than he should

have by covering the rent for a month. It was time to belly up and take care of my responsibilities.

There was more. With Josh's absence there was no buffer for the friction between Kelly and myself. Roommates can be a bitch and I'm no exception. Every day that passed meant we were no closer to filling Josh's room than before. We were under the gun and we both knew it. Arguments broke out, things were said that we probably meant at the time but seem petty and lame now. Does it really matter who didn't do the dishes? Who's responsibility was it to listen to the other bitch when they needed to vent? Is it important? Does it diminish the past, or the future? Maybe. Maybe not.

When the month was up and the room was still empty, Kelly announced he was leaving too. Everyone was abandoning me. It was only a matter of time before I was going to let myself down. I needed to get my shit together, fast. I couldn't afford to live by myself. I needed a plan.

We paid up for one more month and began the process of cashing in every favor that was owed us. I scored the room here at Rackm0unt HQ, while he located a pad in Josh's Apartment complex. We avoided each other after that. All our conversations revolved around money and moving dates and responsibilities. Anything that was fun about our house was suddenly gone.

I wanted to hate him. I wanted to blame everything on Kelly. Wasn't it his fault anyway? We'd called on him to come to Portland, supported his move from the get go. We made him comfortable, bought him drinks, threw parties. We had a past together. But when the going gets tough, the tough bail out? What about me?

I spent a lot of time cleaning the house and preparing for our good-bye shindig. It was pretty therapeutic and helped keep my

mind off of actually dealing with everything. When I did talk about it all I ever did was bitch. Stick to what you're good at, that's what I say.

Cleaning Fort Awesome reminded me a lot of cleaning The Blitzhaus. Everyone left before me at The Blitzhaus too. I had to stick around for a few days by myself and clean. Sure, people would lend a hand when they could, but there was always so much more to do before it was done. There were floors to sweep, cabinets to clear out, cat piss to clean up, carpets to be shampooed. Maybe I have a different concept of "clean". Maybe I notice things that aren't there. Every time someone would finish a room I'd look in and find it a mess. The whole process was nerve wracking. I felt like lighting a fire and running as fast as I could to leave it all behind. Every time I'd reach for my lighter, something always stopped me.

Out last party at Fort Awesome was sort of a disaster. A lot of people showed up and I got blitheringly drunk. I tried to hide the fact I was pissed that no one had helped me. I tried to hide the fact that I was mad at my ex-roommates for having their own lives and their own obligations. I made some sort of idiotic speech that everyone seemed to hope would end soon. Eventually I passed out, tired of putting on one last show for everyone. For five years I'd been the head of two houses, the whole time now amounted to me putting on a show. I was the connecting thread and now I was being pulled out of the only place I felt comfortable. It all made me as sick as the booze did.

Moving was hell. I'm a packrat by nature. I had so many boxes of stuff I couldn't keep track of it all. Every time I thought I was done there was a new nook that I had shoved something into. There was always more stuff to pack. By the end of it I was finding things that I'd never unpacked the first time around. I

was pulling my hair out. I called my dad and begged him to help me move the bigger things. Beyond that I had to ask my girlfriend if she could help drive me around. I never learned how to drive, never owned a car that worked. I'd been reduced to this state of begging everyone for help just to perform the most mundane of tasks. All the independence I'd gained in the last five years was sucked out of me in the process of moving.

When all was said and done, she broke up with me. Apparently she had wanted to, but knew that it would be too stressful to spring on me while I was moving. I wanted to cry about it more than I did. I wanted to yell out and tell her it wasn't fair. I wanted her to understand how I felt about her, but the problem was I never said it. I never was able to tell her how I felt because I didn't know how until it was too late. I thought she would just somehow know. Apparently she didn't. I felt cheated and alone. I wanted a second chance that I knew I was never gonna get. I sat in my new room full of boxes of crap I was embarrassed to admit I owned trying to figure out what to do next.

For months I ignored the problem. I had a new house to settle into, a new roommate to pester and plenty of distractions to keep my busy. Or at least, I pretended I was busy – gosh, I'm *really* busy these days, ya know – trying to organize my comic books or read books I wasn't interested in finishing. I told people I was trying to get some writing done when it was pretty obvious by the look on my face that I hadn't created any textual output in months. I didn't feel much like leaving the house. There didn't seem to be much point. Everyone I knew was happy with their girlfriends, secure in their finances and looking forward to the summer. I couldn't really afford to go out anyway since all my bills had doubled; the only thing summer had to offer was less time at night that I had to spend alone.

I started to get those horrible hallucinations I got last summer. Every time I see a knife, I would get this horrible mental flash of stabbing everyone and everything before I sink it into my own chest. It lasts only seconds, but it shakes me beyond belief. I have no desire to hurt people or myself. I'm afraid of pain and death more than anything. But I go to chop some mushrooms and suddenly I feel woozy again. I need to sit down. As if cooking wasn't already an ordeal as it was.

What happened? For five years I never had to make a single phone call. There was a party at my house almost every night because I lived with my friends. My house had always been the default place to hang out when there wasn't anything else to do. Everyone would just drop by and I used to welcome it. Need a couch to sleep on? I've got blankets! Need a beer? I think I've got an extra one somewhere... Hungry? There's some ramen in the cupboard. Or if you just want to hang out and shoot the shit, that's cool too. I got some new CDs we could listen too...

I tried my hardest to be the best friend that I could be. I went out of my way to be supportive of friends because I'd been through so much negative crap in School. I knew what it was like to have your friends tell you one thing while they do something else. I knew what it was like to get broken up with, to be left behind by your friends, to have to spend every night in your room waiting for the phone to ring. I didn't want that to happen to people I knew. I returned all the phone calls; I went to all the parties people were throwing. I never wanted anyone I cared about to go through that kind of bullshit again.

And now what? Some great reward for years of dedicated service as a friend. Every time I call everyone I know people rarely call me back. People seem to be leaving me behind, not telling me about things for one reason or another. I'm at the lowest

point I've been at in years and instead of the support and a helping hand I get comments like, "Well, we just don't like to hang out with you when you're depressed." I feel like everyone turned their backs on me. I feel like people are whispering about me behind my back. "It was fun to hang out with him for a few years, but look at him now? Unemployed, single, without a college degree. He has no confidence when it comes to dating, and he's always broke. He doesn't even like porno! Remember how he used to bitch about his job? How lame was that?"

It used to be that when I was depressed or upset, I went shopping for books or records. But I can't afford that anymore. What's going on? When people do talk to me, they always say the same thing too: "You'll get over it." What does that mean? You've just invalidated my current emotional state by implying that it's not "normal" and that eventually I'll feel "better." Thanks a lot. You want to kick me in the ass when I bend over to tie some else's shoes, too?

Everyone I look at has such tight-knit social circles. They're practically impenetrable. This town is full of people who are too cool to talk to, too cool to hang out with, too cool to even bother to be cool anymore. If it's not the floppy hair and glasses, it's the scooters, or the denim jackets, or a million other things that everyone else seems to have and I don't. I will never be indie enough. I will never be mod enough. I will never rock enough, or be punk enough, or be anything enough for anyone. Every place I go I feel like I'm being left out of some secret club or some special organization that I'm just not cool enough to be a part of. I want to scream and yell at them. If I looked cool enough they'd want to hang out with me. If I had the right kind of job that girl would talk to me. If I listened to the right bands, lived in the right kind of house and went to the right shows I'll never feel like this again.

If I knew all the secrets people would never treat me like an outsider again. I wouldn't have to spend every night, alone, waiting for the phone to ring. I could be cool if I only knew how to act cool.

I know it my heart it's not true, though. Or at least I hope it's not. The reason people don't call me back is because they're busy. The reason it looks like they're whispering about me is because it's none of my business and I keep looking at them as if it is. I may not have gotten the help I wanted or the support I felt like I needed when the shit hit the fan, but it's only because I didn't know how to ask for it.

Nobody's fault but my own.

If I were cooler, the cool kids still wouldn't hang out with me. If I were better at talking to girls I still wouldn't get the kind of dates I want. If I had more friends to help me move she would have still broken up with me. If I were better at communicating my feelings Josh and Kelly would have still moved out. If I could afford to go out every night it doesn't mean there would be something worth doing. If I didn't feel like crap my friends would still be busy when I called and asked them to hang out. Just because I feel like the world's against me doesn't mean it actually is.

It's just the way the cards were laid out in the first place.

Endgame

I went back to the concrete riser, just next to the sidewalk, to try and play the cards I'd found. I was no closer to knowing the rules, though. At this point it didn't matter. I'd gone this far without knowing what's going on. Would it really affect the game now?

There was no one else on the sidewalk and I couldn't find anyone else that was playing cards. I looked around at everyone, but they were all busy with their little mundane lives. So self-absorbed and focused on their own needs. They reminded me of myself. Did I really want to play cards with them anyway?

I sat down for a while to try and take it all in. Where should I go? What should I do? There was nothing to guide me. No force to even give me a push in the right direction. All I had left was this stupid Poker Hand I couldn't do anything with.

I was free. I was frightened. I was unemployed, single and broke.

But I was free.

I left the concrete riser. I was tired of sitting on these cards I didn't know how to play. If this was the hand that life dealt me, I didn't want to have anything else to do with it.

It's time to learn how to play a new game.

It's time to move on.

The End



Things That Help Me Get Through The Day:

(An Abridged List, That Is…)

10.) Weezer ("The World Has Turned…" & "The Good Life" in Particular).
09.) Nerf Herder ("Bridge Under Troubled Water").
08.) Pump Up The Volume. (Especially all the scenes with Norah's bespectacled blond bombshell friend in the shot. "It's after 8:30 so I guess it's okay to kill myself." "Oh no, it's after 3 so I guess I'm totally fucked!"
07.) Sierra Compilation CD: "Return Of The King" (Part III in a series entitled "The Lord Of The Rings").
06.) Food I can stand! Olé Olé Burritos with a Lime Soda, Triscuits & Salsa, Ginger Ale.
05.) Zorn and Sydney at Shanghai, who are not only really fuckin' swell people, but who also cut my bar tab in half most every Friday night. Thanks guys.
04.) Katie (Moral Support Department), Steve (Proof-Reading Expert, Comic Artist & "Powers" Connection), Jessica, Tyler, Jeromy, Bas, Sarah, Andy, Jean, Melissa, Rorry, Judy, Glenn & Jackie

who all put up with my crap and made that job bearable while it lasted. Additional human support network: GyrlX (Just cuz), Cheryl (for Motorhead & Just Being Awesome in general), Sierra (shoulder to cry on, literally), Ransom (sympathizer & all around rockin' guy), Design Pirate (for the free design work... thanks dude), Brian ("Yeah! Psychoholic! Baby!") & The entire Shanghai Crew, even if it is a bit of a strain on the old Pocketbook these days.

03.) ...And You Will Know Us By The Trail Of Dead's show @ The Blackbird where I cornered Conrad and told him I loved his band – again – and he was still really nice to me anyway and gave me a button even if I could have been a nutcase. Actually, there've been a lot of good Blackbird shows to be thankful about (Last Of The Juanitas!), so we'll tack that on too... but mostly the TOD show, which was so fuckin' good it hurts.

02.) Knowing I never have to face that horrible Ogre or that pitiful Troll again, even if it means that I'm poor and jobless and distraught because of it.

01.) Pretty girls who don't look the other way when I try and smile at them.

Random Notes Dept.:

It's a new issue, and a new look too. You can only go so long before something's got to give. Go with the flow, right? Not only does the new format fit the theme of this issue, but also it's been a lot of fun to play with on my computer. I've learned a lot about MS Word over the last few months just from trial and error, so I have a feeling I'll be able to only improve over time. Three cheers for me.

This issue was also different in the way it was written. I have often gone about the task of putting together pieces of writing by just hammering them out over a period of time, often out of order (work a bit on this one, then a bit on that one, then finish another, then go back to the first, etc.). This time I not only introduced the "sequential writing" concept, but worked with two proofreaders who proved invaluable.

My friend Katie not only checked for errors but also worked with me on most of the text that appears in the issue. She was really good about pointing out what parts worked, what didn't and made it very clear when I had been too vague. She was invaluable when it came to the completion of this issue and I hope she didn't take all the doom & gloom I've been spreading recently too seriously. Thanks Katie!

Steve not only contributed cartoons for this issue, but also did his fair share of proofreading. (He also managed to lend a friendly ear on several occasions when I needed to vent for one reason or another, even though he probably had just as much reason to want to get something off of his chest too.) Steve, you rule! He also told me about the "Deadheads Can't Dance" band name, which was so funny I couldn't help but steal it.

This issue has been over a year in the making (that's been the case with the last few issues, actually), mostly because I've been

suffering from extreme writer's block. It's really hard to stay fresh concerning writing, especially concerning my own mode of writing (autobiography). By the time I've finished and published a new issue, all the stuff that happened is so old as to seem irrelevant. "I've got new stories, I should write about that instead!"

It was that kind of mindset that kept delaying this issue. I would set to work on something and when I was done I'd be so emotionally drained that I'd take a long break from writing afterward. By the time I got back to it, the piece was old and I had newer ideas. I scrapped an entire issue that took place over the course of last summer just because when I finished putting a lot of it together it was already Fall and I felt like it was old. We'll see if I ever revive those themes or not.

Furthermore, the website has been trucking along at a pretty decent pace too. Though I haven't completed all the updates I have planned for it, there have been a lot of additions since I put out the last issue. I am constantly adding things to the "On-Line Publishing" section that you won't find in any of the regular issues. You should check it out (**http://acronym.rackm0unt.org**). Now that this issue is done, I hope to finish up a lot of the plans I had for it. We'll see how quickly that all comes together.

While you're visiting the site, you should go to the News Section and sign up for the mailing list. Whenever I make any updates to the site you will receive an e-mail update regarding any News that there might be. This concerns new issues, site updates, and anything else that's related. It's really awesome that Brian set all of that up and it's been really useful in helping me keep interested people up-to-date. Check it out!

"Poker Face" & "It's Why We're Here In The First Place" were both part of that "lost issue" from last summer. I only vaguely remember everything that I had for it, but I know that I

wanted some sort of comedic style journal that followed my lack-of-success with dating. For some reason the song, "Lust For Life," figured into that in some way. "Endgame" was written recently, however, in an attempt to bookend the interior work. I think it works pretty well. (And yes, I really did find the five playing cards mentioned in that piece.)

The "Abstrakt Kat" comics that Steve did are based on a regular cartoon he used to draw at The Bookstore. Occasionally he would draw a new "Abstrakt Kat" cartoon and put it on his bulletin board. I always enjoyed them, and finally managed to get a couple in here. He's only been telling me about his "Angriest Girl In The World" Comics since I met him, so not only is it nice to get one in here, it was good to finally read one at all. Hopefully his stuff will become a regular feature in future issues. We'll see.

Both parts of "Hair As A Metaphor" were originally one, continuous story, connected with quite a few paragraphs that had a mini Cultural Dissertation In Hair Form. Katie really helped me trim the fat on that piece and it occurred to me that I should separate the two pieces. I think that they actually work better as two pieces, because the parallels now seem to work better when they are read separately and not as a whole. Maybe I'm wrong, but I like it nonetheless. (And yes, it's 100% true.)

"A Simple Guide To (Broken) Relationships" was actually a pretty straightforward attempt at trying to deal with my last breakup. I was pretty upset and was doing everything that I wrote about in that piece (sorry for the phone calls, Becca). It occurred to me that maybe I could just mock the whole break-up process as a way of making myself feel better about having to go through it. What I didn't realize is that while I was trying to be funny about it while writing it, when I read it back I wasn't laughing anymore. Too close to the bone. Ouch.

On a side note, I'd like to state that my ex-roommate Josh & I would like to see some serious money sunk into research so that we can develop breathalyzers for all e-mail software. It should be a standard feature for all outgoing e-mail. As soon as you click the "send" button, in order for the message to actually get sent you must have your blood/alcohol level tested. If you are drunk, the message is posted to a temp folder on your computer, which you can later read/regret when you sober up (but now with the added bonus that you haven't sent it yet). There could also be a feature which just blocks all out-going messages to any and all exes, but I'm sure that sooner or later you'd actually have to contact an ex for one reason or another. Computers are good, but they can't tell the difference between bourbon-fueled loneliness and an honest attempt to retrieve lent books or CDs. Someday...

(These "breathalyzers" could also be attached to phones, especially if you are calling after midnight, and particularly if the call is long distance, and most necessarily when you know that person is already dating someone else. But I digress.)

' "What's It About?" "Her." "Oh." ' & "Everything Falls Apart." These are pretty self-explanatory, methinks. (As if extra insight would really help anyway.)

"Always The Young Radical." A lot of my ex-co-workers, who are now just my friends since I don't work there anymore, really pushed me to include the "Top Selling CDs" in my new 'zine. I thought I'd do that one better and just tell the whole sorted story, too. Humorously enough, the first draft of this piece that I wrote was from before I was fired. I had planned on bringing it into work in an attempt to spread some more subversion around the place. After I was fired, I had to re-write the end completely and edit the rest of the piece to make it sound as if I was talking in the "past tense." It was really weird and uncomfortable, but works

better this way I think. I need to send a big "Thank You" out to "The Editor" mentioned in that piece. You rock.

The Design Pirate needs to be thanked (over and over again) for her support (even when I'm acting like a bitch) and the design work on the Front & Back covers. (She did the old man playing cards too.) She's friendly and inspiring and I shouldn't take shit out on you. Sorry. You still rule even if I don't.

To everyone who's had to deal with my shit as I have been working my way through writing this issue: I swear to all of you I will get over it eventually... I hope. I owe you all a drink, that's for sure.

Some of you might know that I was doing a lot of writing for the POMN website (Portland Online Music Net: **http://www.pomn.com/**). While everything I wrote for them is still on the site, I have more or less reached the end of my rope with music writing. While it is still near and dear to my heart, and while I will continue to ramble on and on about this band or that band to anyone who will listen, I reached this point where I didn't feel like I could do it on a regular basis anymore. I was repeating myself quite a bit. While that might seem like something inevitable for a music writer, I couldn't stand the thought of not keeping the stories fresh for regular readers (or myself). I apologize for anyone who was really into those pieces. I might, in future issues of this publication, run a few pieces about shows I've attended, but for the most part I think that I'm done with music writing for the time being. Sorry.

Still, if you go to the website you can find all the stuff I did write. I did 11 pieces total, 8 of which I had completed when I went to press with the last issue. (For my archive on the site, point your browsers to: **http://www.pomn.com/archives/**

archive_col_austin.shtml.) The three newer pieces I wrote were: **"Sucker"** (The Natrons, Tsunami Bomb & The Living End. 5/18/01. Roseland Theater.); **"What's Going On Here?"** (Sleepy Time Gorilla, Uz Jsme Doma, The Ex & Unwound. 6/29/01. Crystal Ballroom.); & **"A Complex Complex"** (Supersuckers & X 9/15/01. Roseland Theater.). Check 'em out if you get a chance.

It's That Time Boys & Girls:

For those of you who have a calendar, or perhaps just have this particular piece of trivia tucked away in your brain somewhere, you may have noticed that I am rapidly approaching the 10-year anniversary of the first publication I put together. It was March of 1993 that I first sent out copies of Bob's Imagination, the High School magazine I edited in my senior year.

To commemorate that, I'm planning to put together a "best of" publication, spanning all the magazines I've done over the last ten years. This will include stories from Bob's Imagination, Bob's Annex, A.C.R.O.N.Y.M. I.t.'s. N.o.t. J.u.s.t. A W.o.r.d. A.n.y.m.o.r., the one-shot publication Trauma, and back issues of I'd Buy That For A Dollar. I might put in a page or two from the two issues of L.S.D. that I did too if I can find them. There will be more news about this on the website as I get a better idea of what I'd like to put in there, so now you have another reason to join the mailing list (hint hint).

I don't know how possible it is, but I'd like to have a show somewhere here in Portland in March of next year. I'd like to have it at The Blackbird and have a lot of my favorite local bands play, but since it's so far off it'll be hard to really say anything else about that (except that I'd like to do it). If anyone would like to contact me in regards to putting that show together, please do so. I'm open to ideas.

The fact that it's been 10 years hasn't really hit me yet. When I wake up in the morning I'm occasionally caught off guard by where I am and what's going on around me. My first thought is often, "Shit, I just graduated from High School. I better figure out what I should do with the rest of my life." To think those 10 years have passed and I'm still no closer to figuring that out is pretty strange. At least I have these 'zines to help me pass the time, though. Sometimes that's all you've got.

From The "Strange News" Department:

Apparently I'm the luckiest guy on earth. I live in a state with the highest unemployment in the nation and the worst job market around. I have no real useful (or employable) skills. ("Here's your book mame! Thanks!") And yet, for some unknown reason, I managed to land a job anyway. As of this writing, I work for The Portland Art Museum. Hell yeah! Who rules? It's me!

I am currently their "Inventory Specialist". You won't really see me around unless you also happen to work there, since my office is tucked away in a section of the building people rarely go to. But I'm enjoying myself so far and have high hopes for this new employment opportunity. So be on the lookout for future stories about me finding rare and ancient artifacts that give me super-powers! Fighting crime was never so emo! (Hey, it could happen!)

Apologies and Thank You's:

As usual, I'd like to apologize to anyone who recognizes themselves in anything I've written this time around (I can think of one person in particular that needs this apology who I used to date). While all of these stories are supposed to be about me, everyone in my life ends up being the characters that people the

world I live in. Sooner or later they end up finding their way into something I've written.

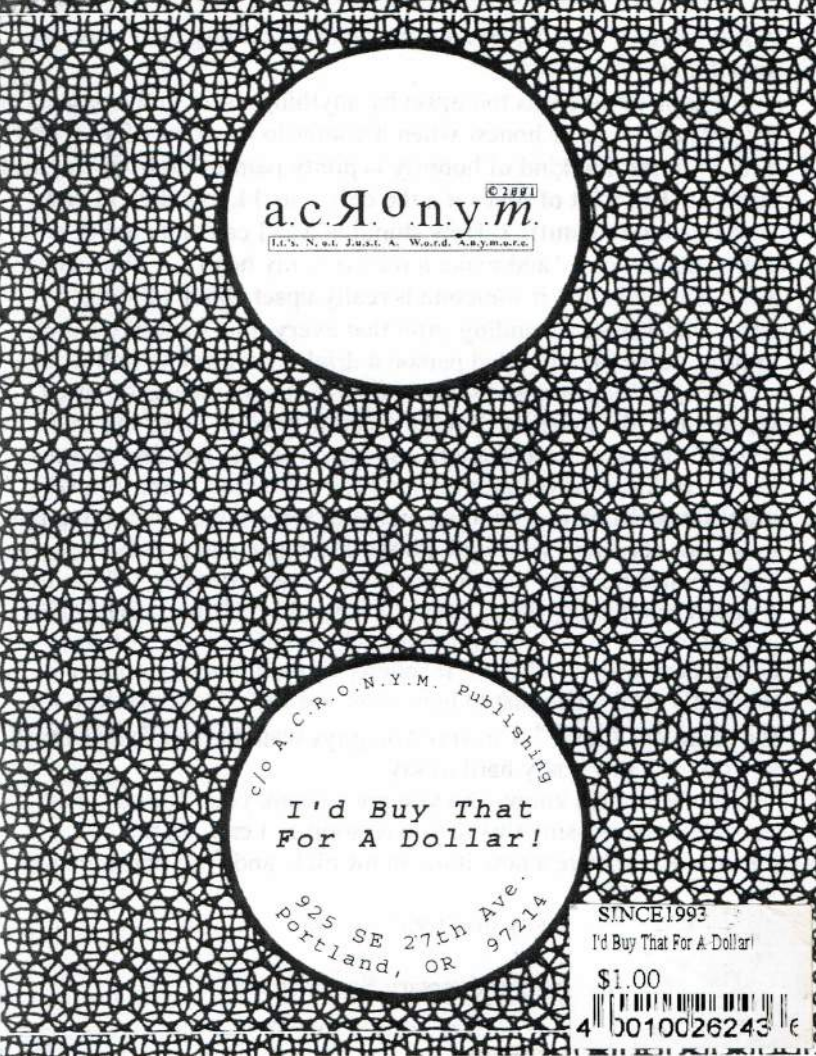
I hope no one was too upset by anything I said in this issue. I try my hardest to be honest when it comes to this kind of stuff and a lot of times that kind of honesty is pretty painful (to both you *and* myself). But a lot of times it's the only way I know how to cope with this kind of stuff. ("How stupid is it? / I can't talk about it / I gotta sing about it / and make a record of my heart." -- Weezer) All I can say is that if someone is really upset about anything particular, I have a standing offer that every time I act like a dick in print I owe the offended person a drink. Feel free to collect.

While I've been pretty down on the human race as of late, I would also like to extend a huge "Thank You" to all of my true friends who have been there in any way over the last few months. For every long conversation about how depressed I am, for every night I was drunk and babbled on about someone or something that upset me, for every late night phone call made and poorly-thought-out e-mail sent, there was someone who was around to tell me that I wasn't completely nuts... yet. I know I haven't been the easiest person to cope with or be around lately, and I'm sorry you guys had to deal with all of that. It sounds corny, but every once in a while it's really nice just to hear someone say, "Hey, thanks a lot for being my friend." I'm sure you guys want to hear that as much as I do. It's just really hard to say.

So, you guys know who you are. Thank you. I'll be personally expressing this to you as soon as I can. In the meantime, we have a new issue to nit-pick, and who doesn't love that.

So get started, why don't ya?

Next Issue: 10-Year Anniversary Spectacular!


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